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The POST *in*

GURKA paced the dusty street in front of the tavern. Most Cossacks would have waited inside the tavern, as long as they had any silver in their pockets for brandy or vodka. But Gurka was restless.

Hands thrust in his belt, his white kalpak pushed back on his head, he stared up the wide dirt street lined with log houses. He paid no attention to a pair of girls who passed near him, their long *beshmets* swirling in the wind puffs—although they glanced back at the tall Cossack with the face of an officer and the sword with gold inlay on the hilt.

"Devil take him," he muttered, "he's off again."

Gurka thought that he had waited long enough for his comrade. Koum had a way of disappearing for hours or days at a time, after entrusting his valuables to Gurka. But Koum was a hunter, a *stiepnik*—born in the steppe—and had only a child's notion of time. Moreover the hunter, accustomed to his hut beyond the frontier and the fellowship of a horse and falcon, felt uncomfortable in this great town where hundreds of human beings walked in and out of buildings, thronging the markets and the drinking places. Yesterday noon Koum had left his musket and bagpipe and the white Kabarda horse with Gurka, and had departed on foot without any explanation, or any indication whatever of the hour he might return.

"He's like a child, the son of a dog," Gurka muttered, going around the inn to the stable yard. "Unless he's tied up he's always in trouble."

Leading out the white horse, Gurka saddled him. The saddle had a red morocco cover rather the worse for wear but much esteemed by Koum, who had carried it off with the horse during an affray with a Turkoman clan. Gurka mounted and trotted forth to find the hunter. He went first to the earth rampart of the town where old fashioned cannon stood pointing out into the endless brown plain. Here, amid dust and swarms of flies Tartars and fishermen

A Novelette of the Cossacks

By

HAROLD LAMB

the STEPPE

thronged the native market, and a line of drowsy camels knelt under their loads.

Gurka rode past stalls of fruit and wool and paused to look carefully around the horse market. Koum had no money on him, he knew, but the hunter was quite capable of bargaining a pony out of his friends, the Kahnuks, and then trading the pony in for vodka.

There was no sign of Koum in the markets, or any fighting. Gurka went on to the town jail, a log pen open to the sky within which a score of men slept or argued, watched by a Russian sentry. Several were Cossacks—strangers.

Gurka reasoned that if Koum had left the traders and had not yet arrived at the pen, he must be in one of the numerous taverns. The Cossack passed by the better places with painted wooden doors, and drew rein at a log house by the river, where he heard singing. Dismounting, he made his way into a smoke dimmed room, below the level of the street, reeking of frying fish and onions.

Koum was not singing. He sat peaceably enough in a corner, an empty pipe in his teeth, working with his knife at a piece of pearl shell. His broad head was shaved in the old Zaporoghian fashion, except for a long scalplock, and it was almost as dark as his tarred shirt. His long lambskin coat, the Cossack *svitka,* was not to be seen.

"Well," remarked Gurka, "where did you spend the night?" He sat down on the bench, running his whip between his fingers.

"*Cosatka chata,*" grunted Koum, with-

out looking up from his carving. "In the Cossack's palace."

This meant the sand or mud outside the tavern doors. The name came from the Jews and shopkeepers who were accustomed to find the men of the border snoring on the earth by the doors.

"Where is your *svitka?*"

"What is it to you?" Koum held up the shell, from which he was shaping a belt buckle. "I drank it up, of course."

A grievance rankled in Koum's brain. He had not wanted to ride down the river to this town. They had been fine and comfortable in his *choutar,* with plenty to eat. But Gurka wanted to make plans—to sit with the officers of the garrison, drinking tea and wine.

True, Gurka had been a gentleman once, even a noble, a *barin.* Once he had owned wide lands and horses and servants, off in a place called Hungary. After he had lost all that in the wars he had come out to the frontier—joined the Cossacks. So it was natural enough that the Hungarian should want to talk to the officers and their ladies; but the hunter, without saying anything about it, felt aggrieved and went off to the dingy drinking places by the river.

"Look here," remarked Gurka, "you've got to come with me this afternoon. I've talked with a lieutenant, an aide to his Excellency. They have a mission for us."

"A what?"

"Something for us to do over the frontier. I don't know what, but they'll pay."

"They'll pay—when the devil rings for church with his tail."

But Koum ached with hunger, and the odor of fish and onions tormented him. After a little persuasion he borrowed back his *svitka* from the tavern keeper for long enough to visit the general. On previous occasions he had discovered that a visit to Russian officers meant either work or punishment. Yet he and Gurka had not three silver rubles between them, and they must do something to get money. These people of the town would not give even a starving man food without payment.

THE officers at Sarachikof led a dull life, being isolated upon the salt plain where the sluggish Ural River runs into the Caspian. Their fort was the farthest point of the Russian Empire, to the southeast. Astrakhan with its theaters lay eight days' fast riding behind them, and Moscow six weeks' journey. Their military district extended for some thirty thousand square miles—no one except the clerks in Moscow knew just where—and in this miniature empire of sand and grassland the officers were supposed to minister to the wandering Tartar tribes and to guard the caravan route through Khiva from the east.

This duty fell in particular upon the stout shoulders adorned with gleaming epaulets of his Excellency, General Andriev Lermontoff, whose inclination lay rather toward Gypsy singers, card clubs and the opera—and who in consequence deeply resented his exile where not one of these luxuries could be had. Of course the imperial minister of state at Moscow should have known that the military forces attached to Sarachikof were incapable of keeping order within such a desert; but after the manner of bureaus, Moscow demanded reports of the commander's activities. And these reports were the bane of Lermontoff's easy life.

He had discovered some amusements in Sarachikof, and had gathered in various sums of money. But he avoided moving on expeditions—it was no easy matter to enter the desert beyond the Ural—and sent reports of patrols and garrison posts which did not as yet exist. These reports to Moscow hung over his well groomed head like ghostly swords. Because no one knew better than Lermontoff that decorations and disgrace alike came out of the ministry at Moscow. So far, he had avoided both.

On the day when he summoned the two wandering Cossacks to appear before him, he had a vexatious problem to solve.

After finishing his dinner he wiped his plump hands on the tablecloth and motioned for a soldier to hold a wax-light to his pipe. Loosening his collar, he blinked drowsily at the empty dishes and at the stout lieutenant of Dragoons who sat at the end of the table, ready to write down anything the general might command.

"You came from up the river," said the general, "and so you do not know the country here. But still you ask for service. Well, I need two men who won't run off."

He did not look at the two Cossacks who stood opposite him, and they made no answer.

"This is how it is. My town is on the edge of the sea, and the caravan road from the east—from Samarkand through Khiva—circles the sea and approaches us from the desert yonder." He sighed, drank a little brandy from a glass and nodded toward the river. "The merchants who have come through from Khiva complain that the tribes have attacked them. They say some caravans were taken—looted and carried off. That's a pity."

Lermontoff glanced at Koum, who grunted uneasily.

"They're horned devils," the Russian went on, "these tribesmen—Black Hats and Tartars. *Akh*—they come right up to the river and raid ships that have put in to the shore for the night. No doubt some of them come into the horse market here, to steal and to spy on us. But the worst is the raiding of the caravan road."

The commander did not add that letters had been written to him from Moscow, ordering him to retaliate against the tribes and protect all caravans from Khiva. How could he lead a column of infantry out into the salt steppe, where no good water or firewood or food was to be had? The nomads would keep out of his way, or hang on his rear like wolves, to harass him. He was aware that Moscow set great store by the new caravan trade out of Asia—but Moscow was a long way off, and the emperor was occupied in fighting a man named Bonaparte, a usurper back in Europe. Lermontoff had no intention of moving beyond the range of the cannon of Sarachikof.

"Now, my lads," he went on. "There's only one post across the river—a Cossack troop eight versts along the road. After that, nothing. But the Cossacks say that sixty versts east of them the road passes an old fort on a mound. It is known as the Kurgan. The Tartars are afraid of it; they won't camp in it, although they camp near it and go up in the day for water."

Lermontoff considered, rubbing his beard.

"I'll send you two fine lads out to the Kurgan. You'll be given all the bread and dried fish and barley you need, with a packhorse and plenty of powder and bullets. You'll establish a post at the Kurgan, watch the movements of the Tartars and communicate with the caravans when they pass. Try to find out who the raiders are, and one of you ride in each week to report to the river post. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Gurka crisply. "I can write a report. But your Excellency knows that this is work for a strong detachment with artillery."

"What is your name?" Lermontoff was amazed that a vagabond Cossack should be able to write and to criticize an order. "Are you registered—what rank have you?"

"My name is Gurka. I am not registered, but—" he smiled—"I have seen service, your Excellency."

He had held the rank of captain in Suvarof's campaign in the Alps, and he had fought through Austerlitz.

"Well, Gurka, no detachment can be sent. My cavalry was called for the western mobilization. I want a pair of galliards at the Kurgan, who will use their eyes and not run from shadows. Eh—you'll have ten silver rubles paid this minute for a drink or two, and twenty each month, as long as you report."

"Not enough," said Gurka promptly. "This is hazardous work, and your Russians won't undertake it."

With a wave of his pipe, Lermontoff agreed.

"Double pay then—twenty to each of you."

"Pas de l'argent ici, les sales bêtes," muttered the lieutenant, in French. "No more money here for drinks, because these stinking animals will go off with it."

Gurka, who understood this, made no response and Lermontoff answered in the same speech:

"What matter? If only they will get to the Kurgan and occupy it!" To Gurka, he added, good humoredly, "No more vodka money. Report to the supply officer tomorrow for your rations. I'll wager you fine lads will get yourselves plenty of antelope steak and catch some wild horses. Don't fail to spy out where the Tartars have their *auls*."

"Would your Excellency," asked Gurka seriously, "also desire us to enlist Tartars to serve under us?"

Lermontoff blinked his moist eyes and seemed pleased.

"Certainly, my lad, if you can. Look here—I've heard that a caravan from Bokhara is coming in, under Ismail Bey. You'll have gold, if it gets in safe."

"Then," the Cossack pointed out, "we should have written authority to enlist men and to protect caravans for Sarachikof."

"Good!" The general dictated a brief order to his aide and signed the paper when it was written out. Handing it to Gurka with ten rubles, he waved his pipe again. *"S'Bogum*—Go with God!"

The two Cossacks bowed and strode out. When the door closed behind them the lieutenant laughed.

"Do you really expect them to go, *mon Général?*"

"Yes, Rostov. Did you notice the elder's head—shaved like the old Zaporoghians? The young one's a fire-eater. They'll go just to boast of it."

"The Tartars will tear them out of their skins. You did not explain that the Kurgan is really a tomb of some kind. When those mad tribesmen find two unbelievers cooking meat over the grave of a saint—"

"We shall not have to pay the forty rubles."

Lermontoff signed for the soldier at his back to fill his glass.

"I wonder why Gurka asked for an order—imagine enlisting any one out there! Still, it will read well in our report. Write it out, Rostov, lad. After the usual, begin. 'The command of their high Excellencies, of ninth September, has been obeyed to the utmost. A picked detachment of mounted Cossacks has been sent to occupy the Tartar fort sixty versts east of Sarachikof, on the Khiva road. The commander of the detachment will use every effort to enlist the Tartar tribesmen, and their high Excellencies may rest assured that the Khivan caravans will suffer no further molestation.'"

Lermontoff signed the dispatch with a sigh of relief. The order to guard the caravans had been troubling him for weeks, and now at the price of a few rubles he had earned a year's peace. Before then the Cossacks would be killed off, and—after a reasonable time—he could report the tragic fate of the detachment.

"So," remarked Rostov, throwing down the pen, "Ismail is on the way with his—"

A sudden gesture of Lermontoff checked him, and he remembered the soldier attending them.

"He may not get through," he added.

But the general shrugged.

"He's a fox, Ismail is. And he'll be well guarded. I warned him to cross the river cautiously at night and stop in the old *serai*."

The moist eyes of the general gleamed pleasantly. He was contemplating the arrival of a true treasure—a treasure such as a homesick campaigner in this isolated crossroads of Asia might well look for.

TWO days later Gurka and Koum were trotting easily over the dry plain, their long shadows going before them. Behind them the packhorse jogged methodically under its load of provisions, cooking pot and pan, and a small felt tent. Dust rose over them and hung motionless in the air. They were crossing a sandy depression where fragments of ancient shells sparkled in the dunes. Ages ago this depression had been the bed of a great inland sea, of which the Caspian and the Aral were the remnants.

From time to time Koum swung over and lashed the pony, because he wanted to reach the Kurgan that evening. He had redeemed his *svitka* from the tavern keeper and had bought a new supply of tobacco with his share of the ten rubles. Although he grumbled, he was really well content, because he was out in the steppe again and he had seen plenty of antelope that day.

"It always happens like that," he ruminated, shifting his musket sling to the other shoulder. "When you poke your snout into the city the Russians find work for you. They beat you, or perhaps they call you a fine lad, and send you off to some black work too dirty for them . . . Eh, why did you ask the old fox for that order?"

Moodily, Gurka shrugged his wide shoulders. He had expected to be taken on as a courier at Sarachikof, and he did not care for the desert.

"Always get a written order if you can," he responded absently.

"Well," Koum argued, "who will read it? It's in Russian, isn't it? No one can read it but the Russians and they aren't here—not a bit. And who will you enlist? Call in the jackals and say 'Dear little devils, here's the written order of his High-Well-Born-ness, for you to enlist and serve us instead of trying to snatch our meat?' "

He chuckled, shaking his head. Gurka frowned.

"I don't like it, Koum. That general was not drunk—he had an idea in his head. It's a mad notion to send two men to hold a fort."

"The Kurgan's a ruin, not a fort."

"Whatever the accursed thing is, we can't do anything for the caravans—two men and one musket!"

Koum was indifferent to the military aspect of their task.

"We can get some good skins, and then hide when anything shows up. Then we'll ride in to the Cossacks for the forty rubles at the end of each month."

"A fine mission!"

"Well, you planned it. And why is it so bad? We might be walking and carrying our saddles, instead of riding in them."

"I'd rather be walking back over the river."

With sudden anxiety Koum looked up.

"Do you feel unlucky, Gurka? The signs have not been bad. Horses haven't stumbled, and we've seen no *myzga*—"

What the Cossacks called the *myzga* or steppe mist was the mirage, often seen in the salt desert. Gurka looked ahead curiously and pointed.

"The devil! Isn't that the steppe mist?"

Beyond the depression white lines gleamed in the air, through a gray curtain. High up, as if hung in the sky above rolling ramparts, a dome took shape. Koum spat hastily to both sides, and crossed himself, drawing out the miniature picture of Saint Nicholas, the Wonder Worker, that he always carried hung about his neck. For a moment he stared in silence.

"No," he said. "That is a height with salt showing through the brushwood. Must be the Kurgan."

After a while, when they had climbed out of the depression and the hot air ceased to rise in front of them like a quivering curtain, they saw that the apparition was really their post. Only the stone dome showed above the top of the mound. Before sunset they dismounted at the summit and went to inspect the Kurgan.

The great mound rose about two hun-

dred feet from the plain—steeper and higher on the west, whence they had approached, than elsewhere. The summit, roughly circular, measured sixty paces across. All round it the ground rose and fell, as if a gigantic mole had burrowed there. Gurka counted nine distinct small mounds, so old that tamarisk trees grew on their slopes.

In the center lay the fallen stones of a small, square structure whose inner dome, built on more solid foundations, stood intact, although the entrance gaped open.

"What birds roosted here?" Gurka asked curiously.

About the dome gray, weather cracked poles leaned crazily. Bits of ragged clothing hung from their tops. By the entrance strange objects had been placed—a dried-up goatskin, some tarnished silver armlets, bones of animals, and even a broken pistol coated with rust. Gurka entered the round chamber under the dome, and found nothing at all. The stone flags of the floor were bare; the wall had no windows and the hollow of the dome revealed nothing except the traces of whitewash.

"It's not a watch tower," he remarked to Koum. "No man could stand on that dome."

Koum shook his head. He had been staring intently at the array of curios by the door without touching them.

"It was made for the dead," he said, striking a stone slab with his boot. "A grave, here—lots outside."

"But they call it a Kurgan."

"A Tartar word—means a tomb or old castle. You ride by these mounds all over the steppe. No one knows who built them. This here is the grave of a holy man."

He motioned for Gurka to come out, and carefully rubbed over the print of their boots at the entrance.

"The men of the caravans left these gifts—" he pointed to the rags and the objects on the stones. "Some have been here a long time—the bowl of barley only a few days. Don't touch them—it's said to bring bad luck."

And, after sampling the water in the well by the tomb, he led the packhorse out of the mounds. A stone's throw down the slope of the Kurgan, in a sandy depression screened by tamarisks, he dumped the loads.

"We'll have to carry the water down here, and we can't watch the road," Gurka objected. "Up there, the tomb is dry and warm—a better place."

"Worse," grunted Koum, opening the packs.

"How worse? What the devil ails it?" The Hungarian waited in vain for a reply. "The dead won't bite us, will they?"

"They might." Koum began to root up tamarisk brush for the fire. "Vampires do—aye, and the spirit wolves."

Gurka only swore fiercely, and Koum went on preparing supper quietly. He could not explain to the Hungarian why he would not sleep within the mounds of the Kurgan, because it was not clear in his own mind.

"Look here," Gurka remarked when they were eating the barley soup. "Don't you think your guardian, Saint Nicholas, could watch out for your tender skin if you slept up there?"

Koum turned this over in his mind.

"Well, he could. But I'd be a fool to go into trouble."

The big hunter did all the work that evening, roping and currying the horses and setting up the small tent before the fire went out. He felt at peace with his surroundings, secure and drowsy. The uneasiness that had troubled him in Sarachikof had vanished. When he had finished he arranged his blanket in the sand and got out his saddle pack.

Gurka did not want to sleep. He went up to the Kurgan's summit, pacing restlessly among the mounds. The sickle of the new moon stood behind the domed tower. Off in the west a yellow gleam marked the line of the plain. The throbbing drone of insects came up from the grass—hushed at times by the whisper of a breeze.

He stretched himself on a mound, picking out the form of the Great Bear among the stars. They glowed like living eyes. The tomb looked larger than in the day. It was a strange place, the Kurgan, he thought. He knew that Moslems often were buried close to the grave of a holy man. But these mounds did not look like a cemetery. Whatever men lay under him had been buried all at the same time, hundreds, perhaps thousands of them. Was this where Tamerlane had fought a battle? Or unknown pagans?

In the black entrance of the tower he thought that something moved. At once his ears strained to catch a sound. And near him he heard a subdued snuffling and breathing. As if some animal were trying to free itself, and come out of the ground.

Suddenly a wailing and moaning burst upon his ears. Gurka sprang to his feet and ran down the slope of the mound, out of the Kurgan. The weird melody was coming from the tent, and at his sudden approach it ceased.

"What's the matter?" asked Koum's voice.

"Nothing," Gurka laughed.

He had forgotten Koum's cherished possession, carried about in the hunter's saddlebag. Koum had not played the bagpipe for weeks, but now he sat with one leg outstretched, the leather bag pressed in his arms.

IN THE full light of the next day the Kurgan looked both dusty and desolate, and Gurka wondered why he had fancied that it held life within it. Koum, who had wasted no thought at all on the mounds during the night, now wandered around on foot, to look at the sites where caravans had made camp. He pointed out that they formed a kind of ring about the Kurgan, because all were just beyond arrow shot from the grave mounds.

"They had to water many horses, many camels," he said. "Aye, they carried the water rather than sleep up there."

"Then they were fools. Look here. This Kurgan is older than Islam—the mounds were not made by Moslems at all. Why should they fear it and make offerings to it?"

Koum shook his head. Why did the men born in the steppe fear the old and unseen? Why did they make gifts to the spirits of this barren place?

"Well," he observed, "what made you run away after the last light?"

"You lie, you cow herder," Gurka flushed. "I was half asleep when your accursed pipe sounded."

"Don't go to sleep up there, after sundown. You wouldn't wake up."

The next day the two Cossacks rode east along the caravan trail to look for signs of the tribes. They found nothing except the monotonous track outlined by round camel pads and dung. After twenty miles the road turned south, toward the blue line of distant hills. Here they crossed the dry bed of a river, and beyond it they came upon the scene of a fight.

Scattered among the gray bushes and sprawled between boulders lay the bodies of two dozen men—tatters of wool and fragments of leather hanging upon bleached bones. Except for the skeletons, only some bits of rope and sacks were to be seen. Everything else had been carried off. Tracks of wolves and the claw marks of scavenger birds on the ground showed why the flesh had vanished from the bodies.

Koum went over the ground with interest, explaining that this had been a raid on a party of horsemen or a caravan camped by the river before the late Summer heat had dried it up. The raiders had taken away everything, except the worthless garments of the slain. Even boots and belts were missing.

"Tartars did not do it," he said. "They would bury the dead toward Mecca."

"Who was it, then?"

"I don't know. Some one from afar."

Nothing more was to be seen at the

river, and after breathing their horses they rode back to the Kurgan—Koum pointing out how other caravans had circled wide of the place of the massacre.

Several days passed without a sign of other men in the plain. At Sarachikof the Cossacks had been told that two caravans were on the way from Khiva, but they were not sighted from the Kurgan. Gurka began to grow restless, and Koum took him off antelope hunting.

They rode into the grasslands toward the north, where the antelope grazed—gray shadows drifting along the brown earth. The animals would not let them come within range, but Koum turned aside on his pony and disappeared into a gully.

Gurka had the swift paced white horse dome, built on more solid foundations, he circled back to get behind the herd. He rode in toward them at a gallop and the antelope, instead of running straight away, fled in a wide circle that brought them closer to where Koum had hidden himself with the musket. Usually the hunter, firing from a rest, would bring down an antelope, and when Gurka came up he would be cutting its throat with his long knife.

"Eh," he sighed, "if we only had a golden eagle and dogs, that would be sport."

"An eagle will not pull down a running deer."

"Nay, it flies over the antelope's head, beating with its wings. The antelope turns and twists to escape, and the dogs come up and pull it down. That is the way!"

To Gurka this chasing of foolish antelope seemed a child's sport, and he would not have done it if they had not needed the meat. When Koum showed him tracks of wild horses, he only shrugged indifferently, and in the camp at the Kurgan he did nothing. This did not trouble Koum, who was accustomed to making the fires and cooking. The experienced hunter knew that if trouble or hardship came, Gurka would take the lead at once, and would do the work of three men. But he knew that the younger man was growing weary of sitting in one place and staring at the sky. If only Gurka could have a frolic with the sword—a long ride and a brisk fight. Since there was nothing of the kind to be done the old hunter tried craftily to draw Gurka into talk about the wars in Europe.

"It can't be," he remarked, "as you say. Now at that battle—what is it called?"

"Austerlitz."

"Well, you say thousands and thousands of soldiers were crowded together on your side, in companies and brigades and the like. And they marched ahead against the other fellows, the French, all in step in brigades like that. Then the French pounded them with cannon, all the day, until half of them turned their toes up. What kind of soldiers were these soldiers of yours?"

"Good men." Gurka thought of the dogged gray infantry, and especially of the horse guards, all noble born, all mounted on black horses who had cast away their lives before the lines of French guns.

"Then why did they act like *duraks*, like chuckleheads? If the other fellows were too strong, they ought to have looked around and found some shelter and pounded with their muskets."

"How could they, when they were ordered to advance?" Gurka smiled.

"They could do it in Cossack fashion—ride to the side and dismount and clear the way with muskets. Then get to the saddle and chase the other fellows."

"Our cavalry had no muskets, only sabers and pistols. Besides, we could not turn off, because we were all crowded together. You've never seen a battle, Koum. The generals make plans, and maneuver the masses of soldiers. If every man did what he wanted and never obeyed an order, the army would become a mob—running away."

"Well," Koum pondered this. "Your generals did make plans and you obeyed orders, but you ran away like a mob."

"Bonaparte was leader of the French —he's a magician. Our generals made mistakes."

"Weren't they Cossacks?"

"Cossacks! Don't you know that three emperors commanded at Austerlitz? Bonaparte, and the Emperor of Austria, and Alexander of Russia."

"Nay." Koum nodded understanding. "Well, that's why forty thousand were killed. A little officer, a *sotnik* out here can get forty men killed if he makes a mistake. An emperor can do a thousand times as much."

Gurka did not laugh. Sometimes at night visions of that foggy day of Austerlitz seized upon his mind and drove away sleep.

"Weren't the Cossacks there at all? They didn't march in step crowded together like cattle."

"No—" Gurka smiled—"they were on the wings, and they got off well enough."

"That's it. They are better than the soldiers because they're wolves—they strike and slash, and you can't corner them in front of cannon. If an army of Cossacks went against this Bonaparte of yours they would tear at him, and pull him down, even if he is a magician." Koum fingered his bagpipe reflectively. "Aye, if you had given the command at Austerlitz to the Cossacks, you would not have lost all your lands. But why didn't you stay in the army, instead of coming out to the frontier?"

"I came—" he laughed—"to look for a pot of gold under a rainbow. Count Gurka of Zaratz, fortune seeker—now occupied in killing flies on a dusty grave. *Requiescat in pace!*"

"I've seen rainbows," Koum observed, "but the gold is all back in the cities."

AS IF to ridicule both of them, the steppe itself answered them that afternoon, when a veil of dust raised by distant winds hung over the plain. Upon the particles of sand in the air the strong sun beat, and above the haze forms began to take shape. White domes appeared against the glare of the sky, and light flashed upon the waves of a mighty river. Shadows of beasts and men seemed to walk upon the waves. They were like a procession of dead souls, making their endless way through the elements without a Charon to guide them. The Cossacks came out to stare at the pageant in the sky. They saw laden camels and masses of horsemen threading through the blue river.

"It is the *myzga*," said Koum. "Eh, there is your rainbow; but down under it you would find the carrion we saw by the dry river."

Gurka gazed in silence. It was his first encounter with a mirage, and this impalpable city with its river rushing through the air stirred him deeply. Koum, who believed that the *myzga* was a procession of dead souls moving from one resting place to another in the sky, tried to decide if the omen meant good or evil.

"Hard to tell," he mused. "We'll meet men and camels, and we'll go to a city by a river."

The next morning, however, revealed nothing more than the familiar gray plain. The Cossacks went off after antelope and bagged one far to the north. It had been a hard chase and they rode back slowly. When they rounded the last hillocks and glanced at their camp, they drew rein quickly. A caravan had come up and occupied the Kurgan.

The new arrivals were camped within the mounds, about the dome of the tomb. Below the slope groups of camels knelt, heavy bales rising on either side of them. Close to the tomb the round summit of a desert tent showed.

"From the east," muttered Koum. "By God, they've gone into the Kurgan."

Going forward at a foot pace, he studied the men working about the camels. Instead of turbans or kalpaks, they wore round caps, and their voices sounded in a meaningless sing-song.

"Kitaians," the big Cossack muttered. "Men from China."

The loads of the caravan seemed to be tea or rice, and since Koum could not speak with the Chinese camel men, he dismounted to go up the Kurgan to the tent. As he did so, he heard Gurka hiss softly, and looked up. Between two of the mounds lounged a half dozen men with long muskets. They wore long cotton and quilted *khalats,* and the toes of their short riding boots curled up. In their shawl girdles were thrust long curved knives, and Koum bristled like a dog at sight of wolves—for these tall warriors were Turkomans, the most treacherous breed in the steppes.

"Too late to ride off," Gurka whispered. Nothing was more certain than that the tribesmen might shoot down two Cossacks who turned their backs to flee. "Go on up. We'll talk with the chieftain."

"Take the horses," Koum assented. And he hailed the men above. *"Ohai,* my brothers. Where is the *bimbashi?"*

One of the Turkomans spat with deliberation and leaned forward.

"What do you seek, *Kozaki?"*

"We are guards," Gurka put in swiftly, "of this place. We were sent here by the Agha Khan of the Russians, and over there is our camp."

Some one shouted within the Kurgan, and the warriors motioned the Cossacks to come up. The small eyes of the tribesmen fastened greedily on the white horse with the red leather saddle. They made no effort to stand aside, and Gurka, who was leading, thrust one out of his path. The man's retort was an oath like the flicker of a knife, but as Gurka went on without turning his head, he followed with his hand on his knife hilt.

Koum saw that more Turkomans were gathered about the Cossacks' tent, ransacking it, but he said nothing. Gurka was approaching the caravan tent—a great pavilion of white felt with the entrance flap tied down. At least a dozen guards stood about this at regular intervals, and one of them motioned the Cossack away angrily.

"Over there is the *bimbashi."*

The leader of the caravan was sitting on a rug in the shadow of the tomb, with a score of Turkomans lying around him, sleeping or pretending to. He wore a striped silk *khalet* and his shaven head bore no covering of any kind. His broad face, pitted with smallpox scars, turned to one side, like a vulture's, because he had one blind white eye. A necklace hung down upon his greasy bare chest—a strange necklace made of dried human fingers and women's ears strung between boar's tusk and huge gleaming opals. His broad leather belt was studded with flashing emeralds and rubies of great size.

Gurka, walking up to him, noticed that he carried these tokens of his victims, and evidence of his wealth for all to see. His weapons were two long pistols, the stocks inlaid with silver and ivory, laid on the rug upon the side of his good eye. A man, evidently, who liked to make display of his power.

"Keifunuz eyi-mi, bimbashi?" Gurka greeted nim. "How is thy health, O Chieftain?"

"Eyi-kosh." The man on the rug responded in the same fluent Turkish. "It is good. What are you doing here, Cossack?"

"By command of the Agha Khan at Sarachikof, we watch the caravans. We seek news of raiders, for the Agha Khan wishes to protect the Khiva merchants."

"With two men—with one gun?" The pock-marked face twisted in a sneer. "Look. I have sixty men and I fight many times."

"Yes. What is thy name?"

"Who does not know Ismail Bey the Bokharian?"

"What goods hast thou, Ismail Bey? Tea?"

"Tea, and other things. Rich—more than gold." The Bey waved his hand at the white felt tent.

"What is in it?"

Ismail smiled.

"How foolish are thy words, Cossack! Shall I tell thee what is only for the ear of the Agha Khan? Nay, I think you are scoundrels!" He considered a moment. "But be at peace—go to your tent."

Gurka turned indifferently to stroke the soft muzzle of his horse and in doing so he glanced inquiringly at Koum.

THE big Cossack looked thoughtful. Many things about the caravan struck him as curious—the Chinese camel men, the camels themselves half again as many as the loads, the strong force of lawless Turkomans, the camp within the usually inviolate Kurgan, and the violation of his own quarters. He was worried about his bagpipe, which he had seen the warriors passing from hand to hand with interest. Reaching back, he freed the carcass of the antelope from his saddle and laid it before the knees of Ismail Bey.

"A gift, *bimbashi*." He did not speak Turkish as well as Gurka who had learned it in childhood, and he was just able to follow the talk.

Ismail grunted and touched the antelope, showing that he accepted it, before signing to a man to take it away. But he did not invite the Cossacks to eat with him. Koum, in withdrawing, spoke casually to Gurka.

"It's bad. Tell him to order his men out of our place."

"Are thy men dogs, O my Bey," asked Gurka coolly, "to prowl in our tent? Send them away!"

Again the leader of the caravan smiled. He shouted in a dialect that the Cossacks did not know. But Koum, watching the men behind the rug, saw them lean forward expectantly.

"What now?" Gurka asked him.

"Tell him to take his horses away from the grazing ground below our tent. That belongs to us."

A third time Ismail Bey assented courteously. He said that the Cossack's horses were weary, and he would yield them the good grass. When he shouted his command, the Turkomans who had been at the Cossack tent moved off reluctantly to drive their beasts from the grass.

Turning their backs on the Bey and his followers, Gurka and Koum circled the white felt pavilion, scenting as they did so a faint odor of incense and perfume. Leisurely they descended the slope of the Kurgan, and Koum retrieved his cherished bagpipe from the ground, inspecting it anxiously. Gurka saw that their saddle bags had been turned out and many articles were missing.

"To the devil with them," Koum observed. "They are jackals, hunting in a pack. After we've taken off the saddles and roped out the horses, they'll fill our hides with lead and take everything. The best thing is to ride off swiftly now. If they follow, it may be we can keep them off until dark."

"Agreed." Gurka nodded.

He did not know the hunter's reasons for flight, but he felt that Ismail's men would make bad bedfellows. Down here within stone's throw of the mounds they could be picked off at any moment by the Turkomans—after they had separated from the valuable horses.

A glance at the sky showed him that they had two hours or more of daylight left. In the field below them the Turkomans were moving sluggishly among the horses, like men who were only awaiting a signal to cease their efforts. He picked up his grazing rope and stretched himself, yawning. The Russians had been mad to post two men here—

"Now!" whispered Koum.

As one man, the two Cossacks jerked the reins back over the heads of the startled horses, leaped into the saddles, and plied their whips. The fast ponies sped down the slope, as a clamor of voices arose from the Kurgan.

Koum swerved to the left, to avoid the men in the field and to shift the direction of their flight.

"Not together—pull away you fool!"

Gurka swerved aside, to separate from his comrade, just as a scattered volley roared from the Kurgan. Heavy lead bullets whined over their heads. But men riding downhill make a poor target, and the Cossacks, bent beside the straining necks of their horses, only feared that the beasts would be hit.

"May they burn, the fiends!" Koum screamed.

Moving toward him, Gurka cried out to him, to know where he was hit. He had heard the thud of a bullet striking something solid.

"The sons of dog-born dogs! Only look!"

Koum raised his arm, his face dark with rage. In his hand dangled the bagpipe, a bullet hole through the leather sack. Gurka laughed.

But in a moment he began to reflect. A glance over his shoulder assured him that a half dozen Turkomans on rangy horses were starting from the Kurgan in pursuit—proof, if any were needed, that they had meant to kill the Cossacks. They were nearly half a mile behind, and Gurka knew that his fast horse would keep him ahead until darkness. But Koum's mount, carrying a greater weight, was dark with sweat and laboring already to hold the pace.

The open steppe offered no hiding; it would be useless to try turning into the shallow gullies or bare hillocks. Koum was heading straight to the south, still muttering over his damaged treasure.

"Hi, Koum—time to change," Gurka called out.

Drawing into a trot, the two Cossacks swung out of the saddles, and hurriedly changed ponies. Leaping to the horses' backs, they settled themselves in the saddles and found the stirrups, using their whips again. Gurka, the better rider as well as the lighter weight, devoted all his attention to nursing the brown pony along. Allowing Koum to pick the way, he kept his eyes on the ground, until the big Cossack called to him.

"Hi, Gurka—look at them."

Glancing over his shoulder, Gurka was surprised to see that the Turkomans had come up halfway in the last twenty minutes. Their lean, shaggy ponies covered the ground with a tireless gallop. The riders had taken their muskets in their hands, and Gurka could make out faces and beards distinctly.

"Go on," he said between his teeth. "This clod of a horse holds you back."

Koum shook his head.

"Nay, Gurka. Only look yonder. There's a height where we can hold them off."

The height was a line of rocky knolls with green brush showing above them. Gurka did not think that one musket would keep the tribesmen off for long, but his tired mount would have a chance to breathe and what else was there to do? Koum had been heading for the knolls, so that the Turkomans were strung out in a long tangent behind them.

Whipping their horses, the Cossacks galloped toward the highest point of the rise and started up the slope, only to find that the tired horses could not force their way to the top of the hard clay bank. Swearing roundly, Koum slid from the saddle and poured powder from his flask into the pan of the flintlock. The Turkomans, who had closed in rapidly, were within easy shot. They did not hang back to shoot, but raced forward to get within short range.

Koum fired quickly, bringing down a horse without harming the rider. Swiftly he reloaded, while Gurka drew his sword.

"Ghar—ghar—ghar!" the Turkomans shouted, swinging their guns over their heads.

And then the Cossacks heard a strange snapping and whistling in the air. Invisible birds seemed to dart down from the crest of the knoll. Feathers sprang into sight, quivering in the ground. One of the tribesmen yelled, clutching his leg — the ragged turban of another dropped off.

One after the other, the Turkomans fired, above the heads of the Cossacks. They turned their horses and darted off, plying their whips, the dismounted man jumping up behind one of his companions.

Gurka looked at the summit above him. Over the dry grass rose huge ungainly hats, high felt crowns with wide flapping brims. Under the hats dark faces appeared, and leather bound arms clutching bows.

"*Hi kounak!*" Koum called out. "They are Tartars, brother," he added to Gurka.

The Tartars stood up, short stocky figures in long sheepskin coats, talking excitedly. When Koum put aside his musket, they helped the two Cossacks with their horses to the summit. In the grassy ravine behind the ridge stood round felt tents, with herds of fat sheep and ponies and a throng of the nomads, men, women and children, watching the event on the height.

THE Tartars had been gathered around the dinner kettles before the skirmish with the caravan men, and now they went back to their food, kneeling on the ground and thrusting their hands into the thick broth, to seize bits of mutton or rice. They paid no attention to the Cossacks, and Gurka wondered if he had got away from wolves to fall into a lair of panthers. These nomads were hiding in the ravine—they had brought in all their herds, and a rider passing by the hillocks would have seen no sign of them. The smoke from the embers drifted into the haze of dust stirred up by the breeze. It was the sunset hour and the red murk of the day cast only a faint light into the depression.

But Koum had no misgivings.

"They won't bite. Eh, they are Kara Kalpaks—Black Hats—cattle raisers. I've stayed in their tents during a blizzard." He was trying to repair the damage to his bagpipe by cutting two short wooden pegs to fit in the bullet holes. When the pegs were in he inflated the bag and tried a few notes. The unmelodious wail that came forth caused the Black Hats to turn in startled concern, while the nearest cows lifted their heads. A man came over and argued angrily, until Koum put down the pipe.

"Well, you see it won't sound right," he sighed. "They say it will stampede the herd. They say if we want food we must come before it is all eaten."

The Tartar led them into the largest of the round tents, where a huge candle burned in dense smoke. Behind the fire on a rug covered bench sat a fat man in a *khalat* of horsehide painted red. This was Tavka Khan, master of the little horde, and he waited patiently until the Cossacks had eaten. Then Koum washed his hands in a basin brought by a young woman and asked for wine.

Tavka Khan shook his head. He had no wine, being, he explained, a true Moslem, but he had kumiss—fermented mare's milk. And he opened wide his watery eyes when the big Cossack downed bowl after bowl of the heady drink.

Since Gurka could not understand their talk, Koum enlightened him from time to time between bowls.

"The khan is angry because we led Ismail's jackals here. He turned aside from the road yesterday because he heard that Ismail's caravan was coming after him. He says Ismail is a black-boned robber."

"The Bey has his own caravan to guard," responded Gurka. "These men must be afraid."

"Not so. They are fighting men, but they do not raid and they have few muskets. They plunder the Russian merchants along the river, of course. But Ismail—"

Koum asked the old Tartar a question and listened with growing interest to his emphatic answer.

"Only think, Gurka! Ismail's a fox—a steppe fox. This is what he does.

He brings a rich trade from Bokhara to sell to the Russians. Then at Sarai or along the Volga he lays in a few things to take back. But here, on the eastern road, he attacks the westbound caravans, killing every one. Aye, he takes their camels and goods. He wiped out a Tartar caravan at the river crossing last Spring, where we found the bones. That is why these Black Hats keep out of his path."

"He's going west now, not east."

"Aye, but they think he would drive off their cattle to sell at Sarachikof—only two marches away . . . Devil take him—he's the raider! He's the one who has been eating up the caravans."

Gurka thought of the sixty warriors at the Kurgan, with fast horses and many muskets. Few merchants could afford, or handle, such a guard. And the Chinese camelmen would tell no tales.

"Why doesn't Tavka Khan tell this to the Russian officers!" he asked.

The Tartar made hot response, his eyes flashing as he clawed at his thin red beard.

"He says," Koum interpreted, "he has no witnesses to the slaying, and the Bey trades with the Russian generals. Besides, the Russians don't set foot over the river. They claim this grazing land of Tavka's—make him pay a head tax and send Cossacks to collect it. But they don't protect him. They protect Ismail, so Tavka loots their ships when he can to get money to pay the tax."

"What kind of man is the Bey?"

"He's a dog—not a good Moslem. Wears pigs' tusks and eats unlawful meat. He's not a Tartar, not a Turkoman—but the tribes fear him because he slays like a mad dog."

"He speaks Turki like a man from the east."

"God knows. But we're well out of his hands."

"Nay—" Gurka smiled—"we are going back to the Kurgan tonight."

In the act of handing his bowl to the woman to be filled again, Koum turned his head.

"What's that you say?"

Gurka had passed an unpleasant afternoon. He did not relish being chased like a wandering horse, and now he saw an opportunity to strike a blow himself.

"Don't you see, Koum? We can go back with these Tartars and rush the Turkomans. They will not look for an attack."

For a moment Koum considered and shook his head.

"Nay, brother. There will be a moon—a half moon on the steppe. And those sons of dogs have too many guns."

"Too many for the day. At night a gun is no good. The light will be strong enough for the Tartars to use their bows. If they don't shirk, it can be done. And then we'll open up that treasure of the Bey's. I'd like to get my hand in it."

Slowly Koum sipped at the bowl. He also had a score to settle with the men who had damaged his beloved bagpipe. By now he had drunk enough kumiss to look at matters with the eye of an opportunist.

"Well," he muttered, "glory to God, why not try?"

Visibly excited, Tavka Khan listened to his urging, without being won to consent.

"Ai Barba," he responded. "Now, uncle, who has ever attacked Turkoman raiders? They are wolves with long teeth. If they came against us, aye—then we would fight."

"Some day they will come, O my Khan." Koum's mellow voice was deep with feeling. "And then, by Allah, they will pick their time and leave all of you without graves, for the jackals to bury in their bellies. Even thy moon faced women, and young sons, tender as saplings. How much better it would be to lead thy men against them now and take their camels, their horses and that rich treasure concealed in the white tent?"

After filling and lighting his clay pipe he handed it to the khan, who took it

and drew upon it until his lungs must have been filled with smoke. Nor did he let out the smoke, except as it filtered after moments from his nose and ears. No true Tartar would waste the precious smoke.

"Aye, true it is," he muttered, "that the one eyed wolf guards something of great price, concealed from other eyes. By day he carries it in camel hampers, and at every halting he places it within the white tent. He takes it to the Russians. No one else has seen it, except his men of Cathay."

"O my Khan, he said himself it was more than gold. Think of six camels loaded with more-than-gold. Yah Allah —what a thing! And consider moreover that this captain of Cossacks, my *kounak*, will be at thy side to tell thee of stratagems. Once he held the baton of command in a great battle of the Franks in which forty thousand died."

The bleared eyes of the old Tartar studied the spare figure and lean face of the Cossack Gurka. The Black Hats had their affrays with the Cossack posts, and each stole horses from the other, and held the other in respect. In a storm, or upon purely friendly visits, each welcomed the other. Tavka Khan perceived in Gurka the quality of a man who knew how to command. But he himself was old and heavy; he could not see very well and he liked to sit in the smoke of the tent fire.

"*Ai, tzee!* He is a khan, as thou sayest; yet I—"

Koum saw that it was time to use his final argument.

"Listen, now. When a dog is mad doth not Allah shorten his days, so that death comes upon him suddenly."

"Aye, so."

"Well, now—this night—it hath happened that Allah sealed the seal of death upon the life of that dog Ismail Bey, the ill-born. It is certain. For he sleeps with his men in the place of the doomed. He eats and he scatters his filth upon the Kurgan itself, above the mounds and the grave of the holy one."

Tavka Khan clutched at his beard.

"Is this true?"

"By Allah, his carpet is spread against the tomb. Allah will aid thy hand in his punishment."

Fumbling in his girdle, the Tartar drew out a case of pearl shell shaped like a halfmoon. Inserting his thumb and forefinger, he helped himself to snuff and passed the case to Koum who did likewise.

"I am young again," cried Tavka. "Tonight I will ride against Ismail Bey!"

HE WAS as good as his word. In fact, influenced perhaps by the copious drafts of kumiss, Tavka became so convinced of the righteousness of his cause that he would take no more than fifty men and the Cossacks—explaining that these fifty were his best men and the others must remain to guard the horde, in case the fifty should be killed. Gurka approved this, saying that in a night attack it was better to have a compact body of experienced fighters than a throng.

They started about midnight, to reach the Kurgan when the moon was low. Although they pushed on at a fast trot, Gurka heard no clinking of stirrups or rattling of bow cases. The Tartars seemed to be black shadows floating through the haze of moonlight. The ponies' hoofs struck soundlessly into the sandy ground.

Tavka sang quietly to himself something about the blood of brave men in a vase of gold, and fair women carried off on the saddles of raiders. He sang the charms of the women in detail, until he reined in and beckoned to Koum.

"It is time," he said, "for the *Kosaki bimbashi* to tell us the plan he has made."

"Gurka," the big Cossack interpreted, "they want you to tell them how to attack the Turkomans."

Already Gurka had pondered this, going over in his mind the site of the

Kurgan and the disposition of the warriors with it. Obviously he must count heavily upon surprise, because Ismail's men once aroused and armed could hold the mounds even in that treacherous light against an inferior force.

"Will these fellows fight foot to foot with Ismail's?" he asked.

"Nay," Koum laughed, "but they will ride their horses through the Turkomans. They will not leave the saddle. Wounds will not stop them, yet if they are beaten in the first attack it will be hard to bring them forward again."

Gurka nodded—he had suspected as much. The riders of the horde all carried the weapons of horsemen, short bows and small, curved sabers, and many had lances with tufts of horsehair.

"Tell Tavka Khan," he responded, "that most of the Bey's horses are below the Kurgan on this side. There will be some guards out with them, and probably a watcher on the Kurgan. The camels with the Chinese are on the other side, near the road. The Turkomans will be sleeping within the mounds. We will not rush on together. You, Koum, will go forward on this side, drive in the horse guards and stampede the horses—then circle the mounds, making an outcry and shooting. You will have six men."

"And what—"

"The rest will follow the khan, and I will take them in a circle beyond sight of the Kurgan—you must hold back until we do this—to the road. When you make your onset, the Turkomans in the Kurgan will wake and run to that side. They will not see us come in at first, and we ought to be on their backs before they can hold us off with musketry. Meanwhile, your circle will bring you in among the camels—start them up, make a tumult, then join us."

When this was explained to him, Tavka Khan approved of it.

"We will draw the dogs this way by the bleating of a goat," he assented, "then we will rush upon their backs with a panther's spring."

"But watch for Ismail," Koum urged Gurka. "He's a magician—full of tricks. Besides, we'd better get hold of his belt and trappings before these fellows see him."

Gurka, however, was thinking of what the white tent concealed. It must hide something of great value, because Ismail would not mount such a guard over it without reason. Probably he sold or traded this treasure to the Russians. It might be camphor, ginseng, or rare drugs from the East. Evidently Ismail had to conceal it from the Moslems; perhaps he brought it all the way from China. Opium—but that would not fill such a pavilion. Jade—but why would heavy pieces of jade need to be housed in a tent at night?

What kind of treasure smelled like perfumes, and rode during the day in camel hampers, and was kept at night in a guarded tent? Nothing—and yet there it was. Koum and Tavka did not bother their heads about it. They would see it before long. And the other tribesmen jogged along by him as impassive as armored dwarfs, their wide brimmed hats hiding their faces.

Behind them the moon sank lower, while vague shadows moved ahead of them, over the dry grass. Gurka recognized a nest of boulders by a stunted tree and pulled up.

"Time to take your men," he whispered to the big Cossack.

With his half dozen, Koum turned off to the left at a foot pace. He would have to give the others time to make the circuit of the Kurgan and he must judge the time nicely because they could not signal to him when they were in place. He had left his long musket with the horde, and had armed himself with a lariat, a heavy, three-foot cudgel and his knife. Also he had his saddle pack.

With the Tartar khan beside him, Gurka swung off to the right, pointing as he did so to the dim shape of the mound. Tavka Khan grunted assent—probably he knew the place. His men

were stringing their bows, whispering among themselves. Swiftly as they covered the ground, little could be heard above the rustle of the grass under the rising wind.

WHEN he thought he had made a half circle, and the mound of the Kurgan showed dark against the moon, Gurka touched Tavka on the knee and wheeled his horse. To breathe the animals, he reined in to a walk. It was hard to tell how far he might be from the caravan. Nothing seemed to be alive in the steppe ahead of them, and for a moment the Cossack wondered if Ismail had left the place.

"Hail" muttered a man beside him.

Thin and faint in the distance, Gurka heard an unearthly wail. Such a cry as a forlorn vampire wandering in quest of blood might make. The back of his neck grew cold, until he remembered Koum's bagpipe which was audible even if damaged.

Then a far-off cry caught his ears, followed by a shot. He tightened his knees and sent the white horse forward at a gallop. In silence the Tartars pressed after him, until they entered the dim shadow of the Kurgan.

And then shouts resounded on the summit of the Kurgan, while men appeared running along the mounds clearly outlined against the glow in the sky. A spit of flame darted toward them and a musket roared. Gurka swore savagely, realizing that he was too far from the Kurgan and that Ismail and his men were aroused and armed. If Koum had only waited five minutes more before sounding his pipe!

Camels surged around him, and men fled away. He felt his horse rise to the slope of the mounds, and he drew his sword. A half dozen muskets roared above him.

A rider pushed close to him, and a hand caught his rein.

"Kosaki bimbashi!" a voice cried plaintively.

More guns flashed and bellowed as the Cossack turned angrily on the man who had stopped him. The hand clutched his arm and pressed warningly. Gurka bent forward, looking from side to side.

Ismail's men were thronging upon the line of the mounds. The steppe fox had not been caught asleep. The Tartars had stopped abruptly, but no one seemed to have fallen. Instead they were using their bows swiftly—Gurka heard the incessant snap and hiss of them—and their shafts were striking into the clearly visible Turkomans, not forty paces away.

Men dropped back from the skyline, screaming as the arrows from the powerful bows tore into their bodies. The musket fire dwindled, as the clumsy pieces were discharged into the shadow. Gurka heard the slugs whine over his head.

"Ahail" shouted Tavka Khan.

The Tartars dashed forward again, slashing with their short sabers at the men on the mounds, thrusting down with their lances. Cries and snarls and the thudding of horses' hoofs sounded around the Cossack who was striking silently with his saber.

He turned toward the flash of a musket and saw the Turkoman lift the weapon to parry his slash. Checking his arm, Gurka leaned forward and thrust, the point of his blade piercing the man's beard and throat. The Cossack freed his sword and turned warily in time to ward off the slash of a long knife.

His horse swerved, and he saw two men rolling on the ground, locked together in a death struggle. Horses swept by him and a shrill voice chanted *"Yah Allah—yah All—"*

Out of the murk a long robed figure staggered, reeled against his horse and vanished. Seeing a Turkoman climbing upon a pony, Gurka wheeled toward him and struck him from the saddle before his feet were in the stirrups. Over the tumult shrilled the lament of the

bagpipe, and, hearing it, Gurka remembered to look for Ismail.

The tomb was deserted, the rug bare. But Gurka thought that he recognized the thin figure mounted on a horse, moving away toward the moon. A Tartar appeared riding at it, and the figure lifted an arm that flashed and roared. The Tartar dropped from his pony, landing on his feet. As Ismail trotted past, peering into the murk, the Tartar swung his arm around his head. The next second Ismail was jerked from the saddle as if an invisible hand had pulled him to earth.

Gurka rode over to him and saw that, although wounded, the Tartar had managed to cast his lariat and pull down the chieftain. Now he was winding his rope about his struggling prisoner.

"Hi, Gurka! The dogs are running. Come to the tent."

Before the white felt pavilion Koum was beckoning him. A glance showed Gurka that all the horsemen had swept from the mounds, leaving only the huddled bodies of the dead and the injured dragging themselves to shelter. Tavka Khan appeared on foot, panting and exclaiming, and laid his hand on the entrance flap of the tent, now deserted by its guards.

In a second Koum was out of the saddle, jostling stout Tavka, to be first to enter. Both became aware of a light within, and of quiet sounds made by living beings. They hesitated, gripping their weapons, until Tavka raised a corner of the flap and peered in. Grunting, he flung the flap wide open and strode in.

"Women," Koum cried. "Ismail had wives!"

The floor of the pavilion was covered with soft rugs and cushions. Candles fastened to the heavy pole shed a flickering light upon a group of slender women crouched at the far end. Tavka and the two Cossacks went over to them and stared, amazed. What need had Ismail of nine wives, all young, all clad in damask and silk, all wearing ornaments of heavy silver and giltwork? Their fingers were henna stained, their eyes touched with kohl, and they smelled of attar and musk and aloes.

"Not wives," Tavka muttered. "Girls."

Bending down, he pulled off a few veils, revealing fair, painted faces—thin Persian cheeks and slanting Chinese eyes. Swiftly he turned over the bundles of clothing and trinkets with his foot. Then he looked at Koum moodily.

"There is no treasure here," he said. "Only these slaves."

Slaves! Koum bethought him of how Ismail guarded his living treasure in screened camel hampers and pavilions, and how he carried his stock-in-trade to the Russian market and did not bring it back again. True, the Moslems frowned upon the slave traffic, but it was carried on more or less openly, and Ismail would not need to take such precautions to hide his human goods unless—

"Look, Gurka," he exclaimed. "Ismail sold these dancing girls to the high, well-born Russians. That is why he hid them like jewels. Aye, they are more than gold. What a fox he is!"

Koum scratched his head, and remembered that if Ismail had no wealth in the white tent, the trader must have it all on his own person.

"Where is the dog?" he shouted. "Hi, Tav—"

But the fat Tartar had come to the same conclusion a moment before Koum and had vanished from the tent.

STRANGELY enough, Ismail also had disappeared. Koum searched the Kurgan and asked questions in vain. Not until broad daylight did Tavka Khan admit that he had the Bey among the prisoners with the horse herd, and by then the scowling Ismail had been stripped of belt and wallet, rings and embroidered vest—although Tavka denied any knowledge of jewels or gold found

on his captive.

By then the fighting had ceased. The Turkomans had left a dozen men killed and badly hurt about the Kurgan, with most of the muskets. The survivors, who had managed to get a number of horses and stray camels, had scattered like wild dogs among the dunes and hollows of the steppe. The Tartars, having pursued them out of sight, gave up the dangerous task of trailing them and rode back to count the spoils. They had lost only two men killed, with as many badly wounded, and they had rounded up all the camels.

They were delighted with events. Not only had they thrashed the hated raiders and avenged their slain clansmen, but they had gained rare weapons, powder and ponies, besides the camel freight and the Chinese camelmen, who remained by their beasts, little moved at this abrupt change of masters. Moreover Tavka Khan had extracted a small treasure from the Bey's garments, and meant to ransom Ismail for a stiff price in Bokhara.

Koum guessed at this, and demanded what Tavka had left to the Cossacks.

"Now," responded the fat chieftain, "thou hast again by our aid thy *kibitka*."

He meant the Cossacks' tent, and when Koum cursed him roundly for a thief without honor, he ruminated. Tavka was honest enough in his way, but he could not bring himself to hand over horses or jewels.

"You are brave, my brothers," he observed. "Aye, Gurka is like forked lightning, striking down all who come against him. I love you more than fat sheep, more than fat, swift paced ponies. Thus, I will give to you *all* the girls."

Although some of his men, who had been inspecting the slaves, wanted them, Tavka did not think they would be of service in the horde. Plainly, they were not strong women who could endure in the steppe. And to sell them in the distant cities would be a difficult and somewhat hazardous matter for the Tartars.

"Those dancing girls?" Koum stared. "What would we do with them?"

"They are young, moon faced—good for many things. Now, I have given them to thee."

And, argue as the Cossack would, Tavka refused to change his mind. He had satisfied his conscience and rid himself of a source of possible trouble, and he was content. Being weary with his exertions he went to sleep presently, and Koum strode off to find Gurka.

"The khan," he said, "has given us for our share all the girls in the tent."

"May the devil take him! Refuse the slaves—ask for horses. We can sell them in the town."

"No use. He won't give up even a pony, only the girls."

"Then we have nothing."

"Nay, Gurka, we have the girls."

"How? You did not accept them?"

Koum shoved his kalpak to one side and scratched his shaven head.

"You don't understand. Tavka has given them to us—they are his gift. He will not take back his gift, so now the nine *bayadere* are in our hands. We must do something with them."

"What? Rope them out, to graze? Give them swords and drill them for recruits?" Gurka laughed.

But Koum was thinking. These singing and dancing girls—choice ones, from remote lands—had been meant for the Russians. Had not Tavka assured him that Ismail sold one or more on each trip through Sarachikof? Unlike the Cossacks, the Russians had secluded their women until a very few generations ago—Koum himself had seen the ladies of the nobility traveling like the *khanims* of Asia in closed carriages. The officers looked twice at young Asiatic girls, and in remote posts like Sarachikof, personable women brought good prices. The traffic was secret, of course; but the Cossacks knew about it, as they knew everything that went on in the steppe. Girls like these in the tent would bring six hundred silver rubles each.

"Look here," he observed, "they are worth more than fast horses. The high, well born generals in Sarachikof have been buying them from that dog Ismail."

Gurka's gray eyes flashed angrily, at the thought that officers would buy Moslem slaves.

"I might take one or two," Koum ventured, "into the town at night and sell them to Lermontoff and the other stall-fed cows."

To his surprise the Hungarian became even more angry, his lips tightening in a half smile that had no mirth in it.

"I'm a Cossack, and a vagabond now," he said quietly, "but not yet a woman seller."

"What's the harm? You trade horses, Gurka, and why not—"

"Shut your teeth!"

For a while Koum mused upon his comrade's nature, and gave it up.

"Eh," he suggested at last, "then tell me what's to be done with them."

"Take them back to the river—turn them over to the Russians to look after."

It was Koum's turn to be angry. Snatching off his kalpak, he snorted, pounding the grass with his clenched fist.

"So that's all the *plan* you can think of, with all your ed-ucation? May your hide be salted down! So we're to take in these *bayadere,* the nine of them, and bow down to Lermontoff and his crowd and say, 'Please, your Illus-triousness, here's a few girls for your Excellencies to take care of, and all for nothing at all, not a kopeck do we ask. We fought the Turkomans, just to bring them to your Excellencies!'" Picking up his hat, he stamped away, muttering, "They'll be taken care of just the same. What difference if they're sold or given away?"

To relieve his feelings he went down and watched the young men of the Black Hats burying the headless bodies of the Turkomans in a distant gully. The heads were to be dried and set up on stakes on the scene of the massacre to the east. Their own dead the Tartars were burying on the slope of the Kurgan facing toward Mecca, in order to benefit by the sanctity of the tomb.

Koum wandered off to inspect the captive Ismail, and it cheered him a bit to find the raider in the sun with his ankles bound and roped to a stake. Deprived of his padded garments, he seemed to have shrunk, and his eyes stared up malevolently. All the wealth had been torn from him, literally; even his breeches had been ripped, and the grisly necklace of teeth and human ears had vanished.

"How is thy health, Ismail Bey?" Koum asked. "Is it good? Then bethink thee that we, who rode over thy camp last night, will take thy fair slaves to Sarachikof to sell for gold."

But the pleasure of mocking Ismail was dimmed by a calculation of how much Tavka must have taken out of the garments of the trader, and Koum became moody. He went off to his own tent and found little to comfort him in the disorder evident at the hands of the Turkomans. Even his kit had been rifled and he had no hope of recovering any of the missing articles. He took up his bagpipe and remembered that it had been spoiled by the bullet. Putting it away in his saddlebag, he drew out his clay pipe and rooted in his pouch for tobacco.

When he lighted it, the pipe tasted bad, and he swore fervently as he threw it down in the sand. If he only had a single mug of brandy or vodka!

"He shies like a horse whenever I speak of girls," he meditated. "He made a fine plan to capture the Kurgan, and he went through the Turkomans as a scythe-man goes through wheat, but now he won't make a plan to get gold out of the girls."

The big Cossack yawned and rapped his fist against his head.

"God gave me bone here—nothing to think with. Why is it Ismail had to hide his slaves? Well, there are priests in Sarachikof, who would make an outcry if they saw them. And Lermontoff has a wife, an old wife. That's it—the officers are afraid of their little mothers."

Beyond that point Koum's thoughts did not carry him, and he fell to musing upon the old and better days when Cossacks were able to do things in proper fashion—when hogsheads of brandy would be broken in after a victory, and the earth itself would resound to the high silver heels of the warriors beating out the *trepak*, and no one would dream of turning over nine girls to Russian officers.

GURKA, who had gone to sleep in the heat of the afternoon, woke up at sunset. The air had grown cool, and the ruddy glow in the western sky reflected upon the dome of the tomb, as if it held the embers of a fire. But the sound that had roused the Cossack came from beyond the mounds—a subdued wailing and chanting, accompanied by a rhythmic tinkling and chiming of tiny bells. Turning his head, Gurka saw no living thing near him, and he sat up, frowning.

All the summit of the Kurgan had been cleared, even the débris of the fighting had been picked up and the white tent had vanished. For an instant Gurka wondered if the spirits of the place had put in appearance at last and driven off the men. Then he heard a hoarse, familiar voice raised in song—

"Oh, Brother Eagle,
I am far from my home—"

Rising, Gurka saw that the Tartars had moved everything beyond the line of the grave mounds, and he remembered that they feared the Kurgan after sunset. They had pitched the white tent again on a level place and were kneeling round it, listening with satisfaction to the strange sounds that came from within. Tavka Khan, installed on Ismail's carpet, snuff box in hand, looked up, smiling, as Gurka approached. Not one of them would approach the tent.

Lifting the entrance flap, Gurka stepped inside. The candles had been lighted and one of the slaves was circling slowly on the carpet in front of Koum, who rested comfortably among the pillows, a smoking pipe in his hand. Other girls were accompanying the dancer, with flutes and silver staffs set with tinkling bells.

"One—two—" Koum waved his pipe, "Round and round— Hi, Gurka!"

"Are you drunk!"

"How should I be drunk? There's not a cupful in the camp. Nay, this is a *tamasha*—a festival. The Black Hats won't come in because these girls belong to us. Look at this one—" He pointed to the veiled dancer, whose dark eyes regarded the tall Hungarian anxiously. "Not every Cossack, even in the old days, had a troupe of singers like this. *Hai, yartak bish yabir, tzee Kosaki khoudsarma*—Ho, young women, here is your Cossack master." And he waved the pipe at Gurka.

"Chapir—chapir, choulbim bir Agha!" One of the slaves cried, going down on her knees and pressing her head to the carpet. "Be seated, be seated, we are your Excellency's slaves!"

The experienced dancers recognized the bearing of an officer, and the fairest of them tried to catch his attention by revealing graceful arms.

"See how they take to you, the lambs!" Koum grinned. "Ask them to make a feast of sugared fruit and rice—they have their own food in those packs."

"Enough of this," cried Gurka, his handsome face reddening. "We'll eat with the khan. And tomorrow you and I will leave the Kurgan and start back to your hut."

"Well, as you like. It's your mission."

The Cossacks, however, did not forsake their post the next day. Before noon animal herds appeared in the south with riders, and reports of muskets were heard. The newcomers proved to be Tavka's horde, retreating from the ravine, harried by a score of mounted Turkomans. They came in to the Kurgan with all their animals and laden camels, and they explained that they had

been afraid to remain longer at the other camp because the tribesmen were appearing in greater numbers.

Tavka Khan summoned the two Cossacks. He told them that he had stayed at the Kurgan to rest his men and horses, but especially to keep the surviving raiders from water. Holding the well at the Kurgan, and the spring in the southern ravine, he had counted on forcing the Turkomans to ride off to the nearest water, and leave him free to withdraw in safety with his herds.

Now, instead of going away, Ismail's surviving men had lingered, and had somehow got more horses and powder. They held the spring, which would supply them with water, and they could follow his trail, driving off animals and shooting down men with their muskets.

"Hai, Barba," he complained, "I do not know where to turn my head."

"Thou art heavy with sleep and fat." Koum laughed. "Thy hands are burdened with spoil."

"Nay," responded Tavka moodily, "misfortune will overtake us, because we defiled the Kurgan with blood. Who can avert his fate?"

He was as moody and uncertain as he had been joyful the night before last. To reassure him the Cossacks led a band of the younger Tartars out toward the raiders. When they drew near the brush covered hillocks scattered shots greeted them, and when they circled the position they were fired on again from some rocks. The Black Hats could not use their arrows and would not rush the muskets.

Drawing off, Koum pointed out to Gurka a fresh band of riders—black specks coming up fast under rolling dust. Ismail's men were being reenforced. When the Cossacks drew off, several tribesmen rode after them boldly for a final shot. Evidently the Turkomans meant to stay within reach of the rich prize at the Kurgan, and without doubt they expected allies to come on the scene before long from some distant *aul* or some caravan that had left their camels in camp to hurry to the scene of the fighting. How the tidings had spread over that barren plain was a mystery; but whispers traveled from river to river, and from well to well.

"Like that," Koum pointed over his head. On motionless wings, scrawny vultures were wheeling around the Kurgan.

With a fight in prospect, the Cossacks would not leave their ally. And as Tavka would not think of abandoning either his spoils or his own herds, they must make off at once. They might hold the Kurgan for days, but more raiders would come up continually and in the end not one of the horde might escape.

That afternoon Tavka talked it over with the Cossacks and agreed that their best way out was to head west, toward the river. It would be a two days' march, with the cattle, and this meant a dry camp the first night—but they would be moving away from the raiders, and the Turkomans would not carry the fight beyond the Russian posts.

"Today we ride," Koum repeated, "and tomorrow we carry the saddle. That's how it always is."

A little after midnight the sheep and cattle were sent off along the trail with a group of boys and young men to guide them. Three hours later the camels were loaded and started with the Chinese and the Moslem girls, who had been placed in their accustomed hampers. Water skins were filled and loaded on the same camels. With them went the Tartar women and children on their camel train, guarded by a troop of horsemen.

An hour before the first light the main body of fighting men, some hundred strong, mounted and abandoned the Kurgan, taking Ismail with them. When the Bey found that he was heading toward the west, he laughed harshly and cursed his captors.

"The vultures will tear the flesh from thy bones, O Tavka Khan," he cried, "but first, before thy death, I will take off thy skin to make a mat." And he said again that he would wipe his feet each day on the mat.

BY MID-MORNING they had caught up with the cattle and the camels. After that they could go forward only at a foot pace, and at noon they had to halt to let the sheep graze and lie down. They went on in drifting dust, harried along by a chill wind. And they saw that the Turkomans were following.

Bands of riders appeared on either flank, without attempting to close in, so that the Cossacks could only guess at their numbers. Beyond doubt they were waiting for others to arrive before opening fire on the horde.

Overhead the vultures circled tirelessly, until a lame sheep or a sick cow fell behind the herds, when they swept down to hover over the doomed animals and come to the ground, to wait until they dropped.

"Their death will be easier than thine," Ismail taunted the khan, who said not a word. Encumbered by his women and all his possessions, Tavka could not muster any spirit, and his men, although they displayed no emotion, shared his gloom. Already the animals were lagging, and it was thirty hours' march to water.

"Well," Koum retorted, "thou wilt not see it, Ismail."

The pock-marked face of the captive chieftain wrinkled savagely, and he spat into the sand.

"My eyes see what is hidden to thee," he said, strangely.

Before long the Cossacks learned what Ismail had in his mind. Early in the afternoon a single rider appeared on the trail ahead of them. He came up at a rapid trot, without hesitation, and they made out by his coat and military saddle that he was a Cossack. Passing through the herds, and gazing curiously at the camel train, he sought Koum and Gurka.

"I've come out to warn you high flying eagles," he said, dropping his rein and swinging his leg over the saddle horn. He explained that he was Ostap, a registered Cossack, at the river post. "Tell me, what kind of brandy have you been licking up?"

"As God lives," Koum declared, "we've had well water."

"Then what are you doing? Night before last a Turkoman came in carrying the Bey's bone necklace. He swore by the Koran that you had fetched Tartars and ambushed the caravan. Aye, he said you tortured Ismail and seized all his young wives." Ostap glanced around. "Where are they?"

"Why didn't you throw the Turkoman into the river?" demanded Koum.

"How could we? He brought military tidings and asked for the general—besides, he had a token from the Bey. We escorted him in to the Russian officers." Ostap rubbed his chin, smiling. "It was like kicking a hive. Such a scurrying about and scolding. Ismail's his Excellency's pet—at least they've been asking for him every day. Why did you do it? Did you get many weapons—good scimitars? Any gold?"

Koum started to make a hot retort, and instead began to reflect. Meanwhile the soldier Ostap scrutinized the motley array about him curiously.

"You've got Ismail's camels," he remarked. "But the devil himself couldn't squeeze out of your fix. You'll be given a hundred lashes each to begin with, and then you'll sit on your buttocks in the pen."

"But Ismail's the raider," grumbled Koum, "we were sent—"

"One dog barks at another. Where's your proof?"

"Look behind you," said Gurka briefly.

Turning in his saddle, the Cossack from the cordon looked at first casually, then with interest, at the bands of sheepskin clad riders scattered along the horizon.

"That's bad," he grunted. "They'll overtake you."

"They're hanging back—waiting for more men."

Spitting out the seeds he had been chewing, Ostap reflected.

"Aye, for the men from the northern *aul*." He explained that this Turkoman village, about a day's ride from the Kur-

gan, mustered more than a hundred riders, who often visited the Kurgan. "That's why we could not hold a station out there."

"Did General Lermontoff know that?" demanded Gurka.

"We told him, often."

"Then why did he send two men to the Kurgan?"

Ostap shook his head.

"Don't know. He wanted to, that's all. But if you complain, he'll hang you."

The Cossacks were interrupted by scattered shots from the pursuers; and to keep the Turkomans at a distance, they took some of the best muskets and rode from the point in the rear. At this matching of long range shots Koum could more than hold his own.

But after sunset the raiders drew in closer and wounded several horses. At moonrise they disappeared, except for a single fire lighted upon a distant knoll. The Cossacks knew better than to make a sally out to this fire, which had been placed there either to tempt them or to guide the tribesmen coming in from the *aul.*

They took turns at watching with the Tartars until early morning, when Koum and Ostap heard shouts and haphazard shooting near the fire. When nothing further happened they returned to the horde and roused Gurka, who was sleeping near his horse.

Ostap believed that the expected reenforcement had reached Ismail's men and had been greeted by shouts and gunfire and that the attack would come before long. The horde had covered half the distance to the river, but the animals were tired and would move slowly the next day; they could never reach the Russian lines.

"After the first light," he went on, "we can't get away; but now there is still time. We can ride off and they will not see us."

Gurka shook his head.

"No," he said. "Tavka's men saved our hides—we'll stay with them. But you go."

For a moment Ostap considered, frowning.

"If I had not seen those devils skin a captured wolf and turn him loose, I would stay. Don't tempt God, brothers —come away!"

WHEN the two refused, he put up his pipe and led his horse out into the haze of moonlight. They watched him circle the camp and head toward the river. After he had gone Koum got out the bagpipe and tried to make harmony come from the damaged sack, until Tavka Khan appeared beside them, saying that he had taken the chance of starting off the herds and camels but that all the men must go with them this time. A grunting and lowing and a trampling of horses testified that the beasts had to be clubbed and driven to take to the road again.

The Cossacks could see the dark figures of children running after truant sheep. A little girl passed, leading a pony upon which an old woman sat, rocking and moaning to herself. Tavka Khan pretended to take no heed of this, but the sorrow of his people, revealed in the dim light, tore at his heart, and he spoke with the calm of a stoic.

"Is there no plan, O *Kosaki bimbashi,* by which thou canst save my horde?"

Reluctantly Gurka shook his head. They could not take cover in this treeless plain, without water and adequate firearms. If they scattered under the cloak of darkness, they would be tracked down the next day.

"Only one," Koum answered gravely. "Take the horses and ride swiftly ahead to the river."

"*Hai,* there are not ponies enough for the young children and the old people. Besides, without our herds and tents, we could not live through this coming winter."

Koum closed and strapped his saddle bag and stood up, stretching his long arms.

"Eh, Tavka Khan, it is written that

each man's grave is dug in its appointed place. We will go and find out."

When they moved off to guard the herds, howls resounded from the distance, echoed by mocking laughs. Then the flare of a torch came out of the haze behind them. The light swung in circles, and presently Gurka saw that a horseman carried it. He had no weapon except the knives in his girdle and no others followed him.

"*Aman!*" he cried. "*Aman.*"

He was an old Turkoman, a greasy cloth wrapped round his long hair, and he did not draw rein until he was within spear's length of Tavka Khan. "Peace—I will not harm ye, who will soon be dead," he shouted, swinging the torch to keep it alight. "Nay, I bring a message. Release Ismail Bey—set him on a horse and loose him, and ye will not feel the knives of torture. If Ismail Bey is slain, the jackals will howl and turn away when they see your bodies. We have sworn it on the Koran."

Tavka Khan shook his head, snarling.

"I trust the jackals more than any word of thine. As for Ismail, his hour is at hand."

"Is that thy word?"

"Aye, so."

The messenger wheeled his horse, flung his dying torch at them, and darted away into the murk. Tavka Khan fell into heavy silence, knowing that while the tribesmen might try to save Ismail, nothing would keep them from massacreing the Tartars.

After sunrise no one thought of escape. They moved at a walk beside the stumbling herds. Young girls and boys, mounted on cows, gazed fearfully about them. Only the camels, striding along under their burdens, seemed indifferent to thirst or weariness or the peril on their flanks.

The Turkomans, twice as numerous as the day before, and certain now of their prey, trotted forward in several bands, keeping just beyond range of Koum's musket. The morning passed, and they delayed their attack to mock the men of the horde who were heading toward a line of hillocks where trees showed green on the skyline. This height would offer some protection—perhaps water.

But the Turkomans had seen it, and just before the advance riders of the horde came within galloping distance of the broken ground, the bands of raiders moved forward and closed in ahead of the laboring horde. Cut off from the hillocks, Tavka could do nothing but form his beasts and men in a circle and make ready for the final struggle. As he did so the tribesmen began to shoot; a herder fell from his saddle, and a camel began to moan and jump about. The cattle surged ominously, their horns clashing together. Tavka Khan shouted, knowing that they would stampede in another moment.

"We must ride at the dogs!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Gurka, catching his rein and pointing.

The reports of the muskets ceased, and all the men, Tartars and Turkomans, looked toward the line of hillocks. From that line horsemen were emerging.

They came at a shaking trot and they tossed about in the saddles strangely; they wore gray uniforms faced with red, and they carried muskets slung on their backs. One of them held a flag, and another a sword pressed against his shoulder.

"*Urusse!*" grunted Tavka.

"Russian mounted infantry," added Gurka.

The first troop was followed by a cavalcade of officers—the sharp eyes of the Cossacks noticed the thoroughbred horses and the glittering points of braid—with their equerries and servants. Some of the servants were *heydukes* dressed as Turks and Circassians. Then, rumbling through the dust, came a field gun with its caisson and cart. Last appeared wagons piled with tents, escorted by a dozen Cossacks.

"It's a general," shouted Koum. "No one else travels like that in the steppe. Look, brothers, he has a cannon." Suddenly he grinned. "Devil take me but he's come after his girls."

THE arrival of the small Russian column nearly balanced the numbers on either side. The precious quarter of an hour in which they could have launched an attack upon the Tartar caravan was wasted by the Turkomans who feared that greater forces might be hidden behind the hillocks. They scented a trap and drew off swiftly to the sides, and paused, uncertain whether to charge or retreat.

Then a solitary Cossack galloped from the Russian column toward the horde, and Gurka, recognizing Ostap, went swiftly to meet him.

"I found his Excellency," explained Ostap, "camped back there—five versts away. He did not know the tribes were fighting. I told him a few Turkomans were attacking a caravan—we heard the shots—"

"What is he doing?"

"*Ekh,* he's looking at the Turkomans. He's just had his breakfast—"

"Tell him to fire the cannon. They will run from a cannon."

"Now, brother, how can I tell him to do anything?"

Gurka glanced impatiently over his shoulder at the restless masses of tribesmen, and put spurs to his horse. He shot toward the Russians, who had halted in some disorder, and sprang from the saddle before his Excellency. Lermontoff, seated in an open carriage lined with yellow silk, lifted a plump finger to acknowledge the Cossack's salute.

"May I be the first to congratulate your Excellency," cried Gurka, "now that you have arrived in time to save the caravan. Tavka Khan places himself under your protection. Will your Excellency begin the battle by cannon fire, or by a charge?"

Lermontoff chewed his mustache and looked about him, frowning. He had not expected to see such masses of the nomads, and he was uncertain as to what to do. Seeing his frown, the officers of his staff preserved a discreet silence.

"Send them a ball or two," the general remarked to an elderly colonel, who was brushing up his drooping mustache and fingering his sword.

"Does your Excellency," inquired that officer bending down respectfully, "give the order to fire the cannon?"

"Certainly," snapped Lermontoff.

The colonel drew himself up and shouted to a captain of the staff. who turned and galloped off with his pelisse flapping behind him. A moment later the clumsy gun was wheeled forward, swung into position, and the horses led away. The charge and ball were rammed down, and a cannoneer, squatting on the tail, sighted carefully—then rose to ask a question. The staff captain hesitated and came back to the carriage, saluting.

"At what does the General wish us to fire?"

"At those devils!" Lermontoff pointed with the stem of the pipe he was filling, muttering, "*Durak*—fool."

The captain hastened back, and the gun which had been pointed at Tavka's caravan, was swung around to the Turkomans. Gurka wondered if these officers had ever set foot in the steppe before. The soldier with the linstock stood up, the others ran back, and the gun roared, smoke shooting over the dry grass. Every one peered at the black speck speeding through the air, until it dropped among the horsemen, raising clouds of dust.

"Again!" cried Lermontoff.

A second time the cannon spoke, and the Cossacks amused themselves by dismounting to do some long distance shooting. The Turkomans turned and galloped off on both flanks.

"Major Vasilivitch," commanded the general, "take your troop—teach them a lesson."

The officer at the head of the mounted infantry saluted, lifted his sword and shouted the order to charge. Hastily the Cossacks got to their horses and caught up with the Russians, and the line trotted past the interested Tartars. When the Turkomans showed signs of hanging

back, Vasiliviteh prudently ordered a volley fired. Meanwhile the cannon had been moved forward, and the tribesmen galloped off, unwilling to face it.

"Again," observed Gurka, who had remained by the carriage, "I congratulate your Excellency upon his success. Now will your Excellency give command to escort the Tartar caravan back to the river? The herds are without water."

Not until they were in motion, with the hillocks behind them, and the Cossacks posted there as a rearguard, did he draw a long breath of relief.

IT WAS dark when they reached the river at last and saw the lights of Sarachikof on the distant shore. And Lermontoff decided to halt for the night where he was—in the midst of the bellowing cattle, forcing their way down to the water, and the Tartars unloading the protesting camels. His men were tired, and it would look more military to encamp by the tribes and make an orderly crossing the next day. Besides, he had certain matters to settle with the khan and the two vagabond Cossacks.

Lermontoff had not been able to set eyes on them after the return march had begun, because they were with the rear detachment. For miles the Cossacks had fought off prowling Turkoman bands. At the river Lermontoff sent a sergeant to find Koum and Gurka. The sergeant returned empty handed, reporting that Koum had been setting up a large white felt tent near a string of kneeling camels, and that armed tribesmen had prevented the sergeant from entering the tent, although a light showed within. But the *essaul* Ostap insisted that Koum had gone out on the river in a barge with some others. By way of excuse the sergeant added that the whole place was in a tumult as if Satan's stables had been turned loose.

Whereupon the general swore and ordered the sergeant to take a squad with bayonets, and to bring in after dinner the khan Tavka, and the Turkoman chief Ismail with the two missing Cossacks.

Being hungry after his two days' campaigning, Lermontoff dined well. By the time he finished his roast mutton and onions, he unfastened his collar and tasted wine and began to feel pleased with events. After all, he had gone on an expedition, he had been in action against the tribes. All this would go into his next report. Moreover—and this would not be in the report—he now had in his hands all the property of the wild Tavka Khan, who could be made to pay a round sum for its release . . .

By the time he had finished his fruit and cordial, Lermontoff saw himself awarded the order of Saint Anne, with a sword of honor, for distinguished military service. Then he wondered where Ismail's slaves were quartered.

"They were brought in on the camels," Rostov, the aide, answered his question, "and were taken into the large white tent."

Lermontoff nodded pleasantly. Out on the steppe he had felt worried, but now matters were cleared up nicely. He did not think he would invite the colonel to his tent for the inquiry.

"Have you got them all—the prisoners?"

Rostov explained that Gurka had been found in the quarters of the khan, while Ismail had been bound, gagged and wrapped in a rug, and Koum had just now been brought over from a tavern in Sarachikof.

"I will see them all."

The four were ushered in, Ismail free of bonds, his green eyes vindictive, Tavka Khan unarmed and palpably worried—falling on his knees before the table. Only Gurka seemed indifferent. After glancing at each in turn and identifying Ismail, Lermontoff drew from his pocket the chieftain's missing nacklace and singled out Gurka.

"Now, my lad," he said grimly, "you have something to answer for. "Ismail Khan is a well known merchant who makes yearly trips to Sarai, and he was

entitled to protection. Three days ago one of his men brought me this necklace of his, with a message that the Bey had been attacked without provocation at the Kurgan by two Cossacks and a Tartar horde. It's plain enough that you've plundered him—you've still got his goods, which it is my duty to confiscate until a full inquiry can be made. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Gurka responded at once, "everything."

"And you?" The general glanced at Koum.

The big Cossack had more experience with Russian military administration than Gurka, and he turned his kalpak uneasily in his great hands.

"But, Excellency," he muttered, "you don't know how it is." And he explained how Ismail Bey had tricked the Russians by raiding the caravans on his return to Khiva, and how the evidence of one of his massacres was to be seen beyond the Kurgan—how Tavka Khan and natives in the town could bear witness to this, while the necklace itself was a trophy of his crimes. "Your Excellency saw with his own eyes this morning how the wolves were hunting."

Lermontoff listened, frowning but attentive, and asked Rostov to make note of what the Cossack said. He had heard something of this from Ostap and he saw his way clear now. He would hang Ismail, and report to Moscow the seizure and death of the raider. But he did not wish to exonerate the Tartar Khan or the two Cossacks.

"Do you think, my lad," he demanded, "that you know more than the government? You were sent to the Kurgan to guard the caravans, not to loot them. *Ekh!* Your looting made it necessary for me to lead a column over the river, and if I had not done so, you would have left your hides out there. You ought to be lashed—" he paused to glare at the hunter— "but I'll let you off, if you leave Sarachikof at once."

"Do you admit your guilt, Cossack?" put in Rostov, making notes.

"No," said Gurka abruptly.

The word rang out like a gunshot, and fat Tavka, fearing anger and punishment, climbed from his knees in dread. Lermontoff's hands clenched on the table.

"And why not?" he cried.

Gurka came forward and placed his open hands on the table.

"Because," he said, "we two Cossacks were sent by you to do the work of a cavalry troop, without aid. At our post Ismail's men fired upon us with warning. We have your written order to enlist followers, and we did so, calling upon these Tartars. You understood all this because you directed your men to fire upon the Turkomans."

Silence settled upon the room, while Lermontoff's heavy face became darker by the second. Striking his fist on the table, he found his tongue.

"I'll have you lashed!"

"No," said Gurka again, "because we are volunteers, not under your orders. If you should, I would challenge you to a settlement with pistols."

THE aide got to his feet, seeing the glitter in the gray eyes of this mad Cossack, who somehow bore himself like a man of rank. But Lermontoff was thinking of many things—of ridicule, and of the report he had sent in about the occupation of the Kurgan. The last thing he wanted was talk, a public scandal.

"I did not realize," he said uncertainly. "The Cossacks say you are a count, Gurka—a former officer—"

"It doesn't matter."

"Ah, but you should have made yourself known. Now, of course, there is no blame to you. You are free to leave Sarachikof."

Koum pulled at his sleeve, but Gurka faced the general without moving.

"Tavka Khan," he said, "is afraid. He tells me he has paid you a yearly tax for protection, while until now you have done nothing but send Cossacks to collect the payment from him. Now he

surrenders Ismail to you, and gives up Ismail's ransom. But he is afraid you will take his cattle and camels. I have assured him you will not. Is that true?"

Lermontoff waved an indulgent hand.

"Of course, my dear fellow!"

"Then will you write out an order, that Tavka's herds and goods are not to be molested?"

For a moment the general hesitated. The sergeant who had come in with the prisoners was watching him, and he knew that keen ears outside the tent might be listening to all his words. After all, his report to Moscow was the main thing—that and Ismail's slaves. He dictated the order to Rostov and signed it, handing it to Gurka, who gave it in turn to the khan. Tavka took it in both hands and touched it to his forehead.

"That is all. Good evening, General Lermontoff." Gurka turned on his heel and walked from the tent.

Lermontoff signed to the sergeant to lead Ismail out, and asked Rostov to see that the Turkoman was locked up under guard. Alone in the tent with Koum, he beckoned to the Cossack and whispered—

"Ismail's slaves, where are they?"

"Safe, your Excellency. Tavka Khan gave them to us—"

"I know. Ostap told me the tale. What—what have you done with them?"

Rubbing his head, Koum eyed the general doubtfully.

"Eh, Gurka's full of ideas. He said I must bring them in to you, at the governor's palace, but—"

"Hss! I don't want that." Lermontoff visioned the Moslem girls being escorted through the streets to his gate. "I don't want them at all. Ismail lied, you understand, when he said he sold one to the officers here. Do you understand?"

Koum nodded, and watched with growing interest while the general went to his cot and opened a leather valise. From it Lermontoff drew a silk bag and from the bag he poured a half dozen gold coins into his hand.

Will you swear to say nothing of Istail's slaves—you and your comrade?"

"As God lives, I'll say nothing more."

"They are safe, and no one has seen them?"

"True, by Saint Nicholas."

Lermontoff filled his fist with coins and gave them to the big Cossack, who took them incredulously.

"What is this for?"

Thinking of the white tent, Lermontoff smiled.

"Have you forgotten I promised you gold if you brought in Ismail's caravan safely? Now you must hold your tongue —better go away at once."

"At once," Koum assented, tucking the money beneath his coat, within his shirt.

Hastening from the tent, he ran into Tavka Khan, who was examining the written order with Ostap's assistance.

"Hold on, eagle!" The *essaul* caught Koum's arm. "What is this? The khan wants to know if it is his death order. Gurka's gone off and I can't read."

"It's for Tavka to keep all his animals and goods, everything. But he had better move off before sunrise, just the same."

The stout Tartar smiled and patted his sides.

"*Ai*, the brave Cossacks have brought me good fortune. Come to my *kibitka* at any hour and I will make place for you among my sons."

Ostap winked and nudged the hunter.

"Now tell me—what about *them*?"

He pointed toward the lighted tent of the slave girls. To his surprise Koum closed his lips, glanced over his shoulder at the general's quarters and clutched his belt. Then he strode off into the darkness.

Hastening through the camp, he found Gurka spreading his blankets near the horses.

"Saddle up, Gurka," he whispered. "Now."

After peering into the hunter's face, Gurka led in his horse and lifted the saddle without a word. By the time he had rolled his pack and fastened it in place, Koum was already mounted.

"What—" Gurka began.

"Hss! Don't speak, brother. We must go."

Riding out of the camp, the two Cossacks headed north along the river, away from Sarachikof. Not for an hour did Koum open his lips or draw rein. Then, after a glance around, he turned down toward the river to a sandy stretch concealed in tall rushes.

After rubbing down and tethering the horses, the Cossacks got out their blankets. Koum removed his boots and filled and lighted his pipe. He looked up at the stars, and listened contentedly to the whisper of the water in the rushes and the drone of insects.

"Eh," he observed, "this is best. Around the cities and the armies it's not safe . . . Still, your mission brought us good fortune. Aye, we are rich." He fumbled inside his shirt and began to pull out gold coins, showing them to Gurka before tucking them away in his tobacco sack. "Fourteen," he counted up.

"Look here!" Gurka raised himself on his elbow. "You didn't ask for pay did you?"

"No, he gave them. He asked us to hold our tongues and ride away from Sarachikof, and we've done it. Now they are ours."

Gurka shook his head.

"Didn't you sell him one of the girls?"

"You would not have it, Gurka. It's foolish to give up all those girls to the officers, I thought. So after I had them in the big *kibitka* I led them out, quietlike from the back, and rowed them over in a barge. I took them straight to the church, to the little fathers. 'Here, priests,' I said, 'are Moslem slaves without a master. Take care of the stray lambs.' Then I stopped for just one glass of brandy, and the soldiers arrested me. Nay, the little fathers can't give up women to the general. That's why I wanted to ride away at once, before Lermontoff found out."

Gurka laughed, and Koum fumbled under his coat again.

"Here," he said with satisfaction, "feel this."

Stretching out his hand, Gurka touched a wide leather belt in which hard pointed objects had been set. Holding it close to his eyes, he recognized in the faint moonlight the belt of Ismail Bey with its precious stones.

"What! Did you take this from Tavka Khan?"

"Nay, he gave it to me, in the afternoon. He was afraid the Russians would seize his horses and camels. He wanted me to give it to Lermontoff, to buy him off. But after you lashed him with your tongue, he wrote the order, and after that I thought it would be a sin to hand over such a treasure."

"Well!"

Gurka settled back in his blankets. After a moment he chuckled.

"You can't say now that the omens at the Kurgan harmed us."

The pipe in the hunter's mouth glowed fiercely.

"Why should they harm us? You said we ought to find a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. I didn't know that, but here is the gold." Koum nodded sagely. "As for the Kurgan, I kept you from sleeping there, and you're living; but Ismail slept there and soon he'll be kicking his heels in the air, eh, Gurka?"

Gurka, however, was asleep. For awhile the hunter pondered, harkening to the croaking of toads and the faint rustling of small animals moving near him. Then, yawning, he glanced at the horses, and knocked out his pipe. Getting to his knees, he muttered a short prayer to his guardian saint, Nicholas.

After that, for additional safety, he rose and traced a circle in the sand about their blankets. In the center of the circle he stuck his dagger with the cross shaped hilt upright, and three times he spat beyond the circle, to ward off the evil spirits. Seeking his blanket, he listened to Gurka's steady breathing.

"He's like a child," he thought. "Needs some one to look out for him."

A Story of the Texas Trails

APPRENTICE RANGER

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

JOE BAXTER had hung around Captain Bill McIntyre's Ranger headquarters at Cedar Spot Springs for five years, performing all sorts of services for the Lone Star riders. He had grown in that time to be a tall, gangling youth of twenty. The captain commonly ignored him. Now and again a Ranger wearied of the unfailing good humor and the respect that Joe displayed for everything a Ranger signified. Commonly, he was a useful errand-runner. If a man came in from a long chase, with his horse "run ragged", Joe would take the animal in hand and brush it down from her tips to fetlocks, and it wasn't necessary to stand over him, either, to get a good job done. Joe was thorough.

He worked leather soap into every square inch of every bit of harness in camp. He carried with him an assortment of useful things: waxed ends, horseshoe nails, latigo strings—which he made himself—and copper rivets so that he could make the repairs hard riders must constantly have if they would keep their equipment right.

Then Joe would clean short guns or rifles. He had tubes of solvent grease, polish and cans of oil. Joe would roll a cigaret for one, bring another his plate of beans or cup of coffee, make the beds in the tents, oil leather chaps or clean muddy boots.

Thus he paid for the privilege of brave company. In all Texas a youth could find no more efficient men with whom to associate than these six or eight riders who carried little metal stars in their pockets and took their lives in their hands to guard Texas from lawbreakers. He flushed with pride if a Ranger played a trick on him, making the squad laugh. At the same time he refused ever to take a tip for his labor.

The boys, shamed a bit perhaps by the admiring service, were too good men not to repay him in some way. They saw to it that Joe received his reward. One of the Rangers, awhile after Joe first appeared, picked up for him a nine-shot .22 caliber revolver which would shoot anything from BB caps to .22 long rifle shells. The weapon weighed twenty-two ounces, had a six inch barrel and felt like a real gun. Joe kept the weapon immaculate. The Rangers kept him supplied with ammunition. Joe made himself five scabbards for the gun, not one wholly satisfactory to the Texas men, who claimed roughness of drag in one, the wrong pitch in another, a too-slick in a third. The sixth, however, was all right.

They bought Joe dozens of boxes of cartridges, and Joe would coax each one of the men to shoot some of them so he could watch their technique. One was a straight right hand hip-drawer, another a left armpit holster man; a third was left handed—Lefty Buck, who insisted Joe practise to familiarize himself with the advantages of southpaw shooting. Joe went through all the motions of pull and snap, but he refused to shoot in the presence of any Ranger.

"I couldn't," he protested. "What could I do? You'd laugh at my shootin'."

That was funny. Joe was a good joke, the chief amusement of the headquarters camp, and when he was away about his own affairs he was missed. Joe lived forty miles west, at the Deep Washes.

During the prime fur season, he trapped. He killed game, too, and when a cougar went bad he killed the beast and received the two hundred fifty dollar bounty. Joe worked only in the roundups and brandings when good riders could be taken on at top wages for weeks or months. Joe wasn't unskilled or shiftless by any means. At seventeen he was as good as any one at roping, holding and trailing, and he was a prime mesquite hand, bringing mean cows out of thicker chaparral or brush more surely than any but the best.

Long armed, homely in a way, Joe Baxter was one of those comical chaps, laughable but efficient. The Rangers who chanced to pass through the country where Joe claimed his trapping, dropped in at his camp; and they got better cooking than most of them ever before knew.

Talking with a foreman or rancher about Joe, the Rangers learned that the youngster was tophand stuff, except that he didn't stick to a job. He rode horses supplied by the brand employing him, and he rode anything. The horses he rode over the trapline were pretty shacky looking beasts, and for two years Joe came to the Cedar Spot Springs on an animal which the Rangers immediately named Sawbuck, and Joe accepted the name. The horse and Joe looked alike, and if they did more around slowly, they covered the ground they had in mind.

Joe brought to the Ranger camp haunches of venison, birds, and even fish, which were welcomed. When Joe shot an animal he usually skinned and cut it up. That he caught fish and shot game was obvious. Rangers knew that Joe had a .30-30 carbine, but all he ever carried was that absurd .22 revolver, which no one ever saw him shoot.

The attempts to get the weapon in exactly the right position for Joe to make the fastest possible draw, lining up the muzzle with his mark, came to a kind of climax when Ranger Alvorn, claiming that Joe Baxter needed a special harness for the length of his arms if he would obtain the fastest and best results in shooting, went over to Marfa one day

orders and saw something in the Ladies' Furnishings, displayed in the window, that made him think of Joe.

This was a holster with a wide strap clasped around a wax leg just above the knee. From it two tugs, or straps, extended to a belt arrangement so the garter wouldn't have to be drawn too tight. Every one knew a Ranger was in town, and Alvorn had quite a time making up his mind and losing popular attention long enough to enter the shop. But finally he succeeded, only to find himself with the proprietress and two saleswomen holding him to the points. Though a brave and persistent man, Purt Alvorn wondered, long before he emerged from the triangular attention, on whom the joke was—Joe Baxter or himself.

However, Madam Turbleu was a good sales manager and, if she rolled her eyes when Alvorn explained that he wanted to give a present to a gunman with receding knee caps, whose arms were so long his gun had to be hung low, she brought out seven holsters in seven hues and shades, with the harnesses to match. So Purt rode away with quite a dent in his expense account, chargeable to himself. He knew, though, that the other Rangers would chip in to make up for it.

Joe's gray eyes watched the two Rangers adjust the garter above what Alvorn called Joe's receding knee cap. The victim of the gift waved his hand pendulum-wise till the butt had been adjusted to the sixteenth of an inch. Joe obeyed orders. He stood, sat, rode in his saddle and drew—drew the .22 revolver a hundred times from its new holster. The special leg holster was just exactly what a man with gorilla arms needed to have the weapon at exactly the right place for a fast draw. But Joe refused to shoot. His neck and ears were red with modesty as he shook his head.

"You'd laugh at me," he said plaintively.

That was all too much for the Rangers. They could control their emotions or they surely would have laughed then and there.

Joe was so overcome that he abruptly rode away. His gangling horse, Sawbuck, his loose seat in the saddle and the shambling gait were ridiculous. The rider didn't look back. He headed southwest toward the country where he was going to trap that Winter. Something in Joe's bearing held the watchers. No keener observers could have scrutinized him, and Captain Bill McIntyre turned to Purt Alvorn and voiced the feelings of all.

"I don't reckon our chore boy's coming back, Alvorn—not after this."

Two of the Rangers saw Joe cutting down across country toward town about three weeks later. He had two packhorses loaded with bales which they recognized as furs and hides. He didn't seem to recognize them at a quarter of a mile. They told Alvorn about it when they returned several days later from their mission.

"What of it?" Alvorn demanded.

"Drop it!" McIntyre spoke sharply.

THE Border outlaws, ever a difficult problem, had been growing bold. They needed handling in the Ranger way, and one evening Captain McIntyre took Buck Naman and Tom Hucklem over into the Jungle below Both Way Ford.

Alvorn, since he was the senior of those left behind, had charge of the camp in the captain's absence. Three of the boys were waiting for something to do when a slip of paper came blowing through the flap of the captain's tent and flew fluttering along till Alvorn caught it. Something had let loose an appointment blank of the Texas Rangers, and Purt squinted at it thoughtfully. Spreading the sheet on a canned soup carton, he took his pen and with pretty flourishes began to fill in the description of an appointee. Presently he wrote in the name of Joe Baxter. He passed the slip around and the boys laughed.

None had ever seen a more beautiful copperplate script on a Ranger appointment to authority. They began to remark that it seemed to be just too bad to waste all that fine writing. About all that Joe Baxter lacked of being a full fledged Ranger were the names of Captain McIntyre, the Austin major in command, the secretary . . . Alvorn had certainly done his share. Walt Berry, to whom the task of making a report was a nerve wracking exploit with a well chewed indelible lead pencil, was especially perturbed to see so much pretty pen work going to waste. Accordingly he deliberately and in much good humor committed forgery. He wrote:

Apruved by me—ALONZO MERLE, Governor

The others then took turns and, according to the paper, Joe Baxter had more backing and finer co-signers than any Ranger appointee for the past ten or fifteen years.

Chuckles and conversation ensued. If only Joe were coming through as usual and they could think of something for him to do! They'd like to give him a real assignment. Many things were suggested, from having him go to Austin to deliver a personal message to the Ranger commander-in-chief, to heading over into Borger, the oil town, for clean-up purposes. They spent two hours or so, trying to figure some opportune and appropriate task for a Ranger with an appointment like that.

Talk about the devil! Suddenly Joe Baxter rode into Cedar Spot Springs, where he had not been since the episode of the garter holster—and he still had the rig on.

Alvorn, pacing up and down the aisle between the rows of tents and whipping his nutria hat with all the indications of restless anxiety he could think of, was the only Ranger in sight. And when he looked up and saw Joe Baxter sitting on Sawbuck, with two lightly loaded packhorses, all gravely observing the Ranger's excitement, Alvorn went jumping on his awkward heels in Joe's direction. At that instant he was inspired.

"For Pete's sake, Joe, where've you been? Cap'n McIntyre's down't the Both Way Ford, in the Jungle. Obion's gang's layin' for 'im in the Tusker Trail —only got Buck Naman and Hucklem with him! I'm hung on the telephone. Other boys're all out. Here's your 'pointment. Get goin'! You know the Tusker Trail, don't you?"

"Yes," Joe said, "I know that country."

He was staring at that appointment blank, which a captain would use in time of extraordinary stress. Joe blinked, his lips quivered and he looked at Alvorn, his gray eyes narrowing.

"Where'n hell you been, Joe?" Alvorn demanded. "That's your Christmas present . . . I'll take care o' your packhorses."

"You say the cap'n's gone down the Tusker Trail?" Joe asked. "All right, Purt, I'll be moving!"

He leaned over the horn of his saddle, lifted the bridle reins in his left hand, and Sawbuck gathered himself into a gait neither Alvorn nor any of the other men who were hidden had ever seen before. Long, lanky, with wide chest and lean flanks, Sawbuck surged on the way. They heard Joe utter the low, yelping cry of a Texan getting underway.

Watching the rider, peering from behind trees, the Rangers saw that leaping, jackrabbit gait and looked at one another. No man had ever gone out of that camp faster, and that was saying a whole lot. The laughter was that of admiration rather than ridicule.

"When he comes up with Cap'n McIntyre I'd shore love to hear the Old Man express his gratitude," Walt Berry exclaimed.

"Let's git the time." One of the boys wrote on the bulletin board—

4:35 o'clock P.M. 19th, Joe Baxter started to rescue Cap'n McIntyre down the Tusker Trail.

The boys, good to their word, unloaded Joe's packhorses and stacked the

things in the spare tent, for the squad was short handed. At the rate Joe was going, he would eat up eighty miles in due course. Then he would enter the Jungle, and some time after daybreak in the morning he ought to be down in the country the captain and his two men were dragging.

"I took pains to notice Joe had his .22 revolver," Alvorn said. "He just plumb forgot his carbine. I reckon it's in his trap cabin."

"He don't pack nothin' much but the little pop," Berry added.

"Joe's a good tracker," Alvorn added with increasing satisfaction. "He took the cap'n's trail, and he won't lose no time. Them tracks'll sure persuade him, if he has any doubts."

Sitting around, they had things to talk about now. The one thing they regretted was not seeing the captain's expression when Joe told him of his coming down to rescue the old boy and two Rangers from Obion. As the men sat around, they noticed the sky turning milky and felt in their sensitive, weatherwise bones the coming of a storm, a chill gray windy rain cutting through the normal comfort of the Southern district.

"It'd sure be a good one if Joe made the ride into a big rain." Berry grinned.

They all laughed. At the same time, they remembered that Joe had not waited to ask questions, had moved on his way, tucking that appointment into his wallet. That fast getaway had been impressive, for a Ranger could not have done it better. Not the appointment but his job to be done had gripped his attention. Shrewd eyes had surveyed Sawbuck, and for two years they had caught the similarity of his build to that of a jackrabbit—the length and suppleness of his muscles. But a shambler, and when picking the thorns off prickly pear, one by one, for a meal of luscious lobes, he had been ludicrous. They had seen Joe and his horse with the same eyes.

Then to the call for action they had seen the loose shoulders and gangling frame set square and tense, thrilled visibly from head to heels, leaning forward in the Ranger stoop—unconsciously—to *ride*. That night as the storm slowly gathered for the big kick, the boys wondered what Joe Baxter was doing. Unless he sensed the joke, he would be riding down the line at a gait and on an errand—so far as he knew—worthy of the best of them.

JOE had been feeling despondent. The notion had grown upon him that he wasn't much good. On his way back from selling the early Winter catch, he had been taking stock. Reading, he couldn't help but notice that his many kinds of jobs weren't so impressive. He had driven team, been a cowboy, built fence, worked awhile on the railroad, and he had trapped more than eight years—five Winters running his own lines, having his own camps, and attending his own buying and selling. He had tried the Guadaloupes up where the snow fell.

In just one particular he was satisfied. In all, counting changes as the Rangers came and went, twelve of the Lone Star State police had taught him to shoot. He could bring the muzzle up or throw it down; he could lift it out of his left armpit, or he could point it over the top of his leg holster. He could tie the trigger back for thumbing, or he could trip the hammer with a fourteen-ounce trigger pull. He could be plain or fancy as he chose—and he could choose his method, given three jumps of a jackrabbit in which to go for his gun, and let drive a slug.

He had shot a jaguar between the eyes in a Jungle path. He had killed quails on the wing. All this he counted as just flap-doodle stuff. He had patience, he could wait, but to him the crucial test of Ranger stock had never come: he wondered if he could face a man with a gun and come through unflinching.

The judgment of the Rangers had al-

ways been that he was just a good joke. At the same time he was grateful to them all, for they had paid for their fun, teaching him even better than they knew. He could even wear a woman's garter holster with stays for the satisfaction it gave men who might, in an hour or two, be riding out to a rendezvous with death.

As he rode, Joe changed the ammunition from the old lead, black powder shells to a box of bright new copper coated bullets with a three hundred-odd yard range and a smokeless drive the power of which Joe Baxter well knew. Of his skill he was sure. Watching the Rangers shoot, he had been aware for nearly three years of his own excellence —at marks.

Modest, nervous, having his own subtle sense of humor, he had hesitated to accept their challenges to shoot with them, and show what he could do with that little gun. Some indistinct notion had grown into a dream. When he was twenty-one years of age he would ride into the Cedar Spot Springs and shoot them for fun, love or money. He would challenge them right or left hand, and he would go in with strange guns of any caliber and make.

Then, as the best shot in Texas, he would claim the next appointment to the Texas Rangers! The dull ache he felt spoiled most of his waking dreams, but not all his sleeping ones. Now as he rode, he was under no illusions, that precious ignorance of self-confidence which is the great incentive of the young. Riding as the day waned, he drew out the appointment which Purt Alvorn had given him, and read the measurements, the descriptions, those names of men who in reality might never come to hear about that trapper and odd-jobber out beyond the farm belt in the cedars and mesquite.

Alvorn had said Captain McIntyre had gone down the Tusker Trail to look for the Obion gang. Joe Baxter knew that territory better than any one. He had followed every Javalina hog runway, he had trapped at five hundred cross-roads of the thickets, and there were things which a Ranger would not be apt to know that a trapper would be able to tell all about.

Despite the long ride, such was the strength of Sawbuck and the rider's swing in the saddle that they drew into the arched roadway after a ten-hour romp, their condition good. The storm which had been holding off all night now broke with the dawn. Thunder followed the flaring of lightning in the gloom of the coiling clouds and the falling cloudburst. Dreams gave way to realities. The tracks of Captain McIntyre and his two men confirmed Alvorn's story of their heading into the Jungle. If during the night Joe had outrun them in places, it was because he took advantage of short cuts and better going.

Joe's dreams mingled with his knowledge now. He pulled over to a brush shack where he had left a deer for a hungry family. He ate breakfast and heard news. At another cabin, where an humble and regretful fugitive expiated a crime, Joe confirmed a surmise and added to his fund of rumor. The Border outlaws had at last dared to play a trick they long had contemplated, luring McIntyre into the Jungle to catch him foul. A report that three other Rangers were coming to join the captain was untrue, and for this Joe Baxter was sorry. Six Rangers would have a fair chance.

Joe Baxter would have given anything, even his own future, just to have the Rangers out of the mess into which they had been craftily lured. No pride, ambition, envy or opportunity for himself could ever have made Joe Baxter like the situation, the difficulty which had arisen.

Desperate trouble was besetting Captain McIntyre, Buck Naman and Tom Hucklem. The Obion smugglers, desperate outlaws, could not work freely through the kind of patrol the Rangers maintained. Over the killers was the threat of hanging for several murders.

Knowing when and where McIntyre would come through, and where he would strike, they had laid their ambush for him accordingly. Five hours behind them, Joe Baxter rode along their tracks in the Tusker Trail, the rain running off the brim of his hat, muck squashing underfoot and the splash from the trees loud in his ears.

Then ahead he heard gunfire, the thundering of the skies but emphasizing the penetrating bursts of rifle fire.

JOE heard the throb of a big revolver, and by its peculiar pound he recognized the gun which Captain McIntyre carried: he was familiar with the noise made by every Ranger's weapon, having heard them often in practise. The battle in the Jungle was at Cabin Knoll, where stood an old 'dobe building on a hill in a weedy, abandoned clearing.

"Cornered there. It's sure bad!" Joe thought—and when within a quarter mile of the place he led Sawbuck out into the bush and dropped saddle and bridle from the faithful animal so it need not suffer if Joe didn't come back.

Then the boy felt sick. He needed his .30-30—he needed a man's gun—and all he had was that damned .22 caliber rimfire. Mooning, dreaming, his thoughts all centered on the imperiled Rangers, Joe Baxter had forgotten his own need of a real gun.

"What chance with that damned thing against .45's or rifles?"

Such as it was, Joe Baxter seized his pistol. The shooting was violent and widespread. The Rangers were surrounded and the edge of that clearing covered the skulking outlaws. Joe headed down the trail, stooping and crawling through the wild runways where he had crept to put out traps and snares.

Ahead of him he heard a .30-30 rifle, and though it sounded far distant, when he peered low he saw the bushwhacker, a red headed, freckle faced scoundrel stretched low and watching up the knoll in hope of seeing a Ranger's head to shoot at. Joe lifted his .22 revolver as a terrific flare of chain lightning overhead was followed in a second by an enormous thunder. Joe pulled his trigger and the killer outlaw fell forward on his face, limp. He would never know what hit him.

Joe scuttled around the edge of the brake. He listened and watched, yet in that tangle it was any one's chance. He came face to face with a dark, hairy, cat faced man who reared back on his heels as he reached for his gun. A .22 rimfire against a pair of .45's, a revolver and an automatic! Joe thumbed his hammer that time at a range of eight feet. The ruffian put his hand to his throat in numbed wonder, choking. In a dying burst of rage, the man struggled with his revolver while he strangled, but a third shot in the eye left him dead, sagging against the tangle.

Then Joe scurried on like a squirrel, seeing a rifle flare along the edge of the brush on the west side of the knoll. He stopped short, though, for a man had crawled into the weeds toward the knoll, taking advantage of cover to approach the 'dobe wall. Joe reared up and looked and, because he was a hunter, he discovered the man snaking his way. Joe caught the lightning right, and after three shots knew by the rumpus in the brush that the scoundrel was through creeping.

Joe had to back in and swing wide. He saw an inert figure—a Ranger shot had hit him. He came up behind a fallen log, and found himself between two of the besiegers. One of these was Obion, leader of the gang—a slim, agile weasel of a man. Already some sound or instinct had given Obion warning. Joe shot the other man first, and faced the outlaw chief on the instant, snapping the tiny pellets into the figure which darted and squirmed in the thicket, throwing lead at the indistinct assailant, careless of the heavy vines that stopped or diverted the lead.

Squealing like a cat, Obion sprang

backward into the roadway and on the instant from the Cabin Knoll came the report of a heavy rifle—Captain McIntyre's peacemaker. The projectile hit Obion in the side, fairly lifted him off his feet and flung him headlong in the shallow mud and muck.

Joe heard a yell.

"Obion's dead. *Vamose!*"

Firing ceased. Joe caught glimpses of shadowy figures and shot at them, but suddenly the quiet of the jungle was resumed, broken only by the splashing of rain. Then in the distance he heard shouts, the pound of hoofs on sodden ground. The bandits were gone.

"Cap'n McIntyre!" Joe hailed. "They've gone!"

"Who are you?" a husky voice demanded.

"Joe Baxter, sir."

"*Who?*"

"Joe Baxter, sir."

"Show yourself, then."

Joe walked out into the roadway and over into the open clear of the Jungle.

"Look out! They'll pot you!"

"They're gone," Joe said. "Those that could—"

Joe ran along the Tusker Trail up the knoll to the 'dobe walls. Captain McIntyre was telling Buck Naman to keep his damned head quiet so the iodine would cut the poison in his scalp crease. Tom Hucklem had a bullet through his body, but was lying quiet, stifling his moans.

"They got our horses," McIntyre said, "and ran in on us—got excited and done some poor shootin', or they'd got us, too."

"There's a horse wagon out here about half a mile," Joe said. "Shall I get it?"

"Sure thing."

"I'll pick up your saddles and the rest," Joe said, and headed off along the Tusker Trail.

Captain McIntyre and Naman eased Hucklem, dressing the two wounds of the bullet. Joe returned with a light wagon and a good team. He had stopped to salvage the saddles of the dead horses. He helped to get the badly wounded man into the box on the cornshucks under a big tarpaulin. Joe took the reins, and the Ranger captain sat beside him while Naman watched the wounded man.

"Boy, I had three shots left for my rifle when you drove Obion from cover," McIntyre said abruptly. "How'd you come to be along here?"

"My horse is just in here, Captain," Joe said. "I'll go get 'im."

The Ranger looked at the youth retreat into the Jungle. He heard him speak to Sawbuck, heard the slap of the wet saddle and the clink of the bit on the animal's teeth. Joe came riding out.

"About those dead fellers," Joe said, "had I better accumulate 'em, for the coroner and so on?"

"How many?"

"I reckon you terminated three that I saw, Cap'n."

"You stopped that fellow that was crawlin' in on me, didn't you?"

"Why—uh-h—yes, sir."

"I heard him grunt and saw him flounderin'—he'd had me covered in about ten yards more . . . How many more?"

"A redhead, a cat faced man, maybe two, three more."

"You had Obion flounderin' around careless, too," McIntyre said. "Drag 'em outside the road. Obion had a danged good rifle—you better take it. And if they's any shortguns suits you, take 'em up."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, Cap'n."

JOE rode back toward Cabin Knolls. Sawbuck was stiff, tired but game. Joe, too, was saddle weary in the letdown. A man who read signs watched Joe go along the Tusker Trail, and then drove on to the Mesquite Corners commissary where a telephone connection could be made. As luck would have it, a party of naturalists, including a surgeon, were camped at the Jungle edge. The two wounded Rangers could well be attended to there. The district coroner went

down to the scene of the battle. He took a jury and four men with shovels.

Captain McIntyre looked over the dead outlaws. Usually he verified his shooting. Now he just casually noticed what Ranger bullets had done. Everybody studied the effects of those trivial .22's. The surgeon who performed the autopsies found the hard, coppery pellets had gone clear through the bodies, lodged just under the skin. Obion had been hit five times, and no wonder he had squealed like a cat, and carelessly jumped out into the open where Captain McIntyre could draw down fine on him with a rifle. The captain did the testifying, after the results of the autopsies were recorded in due form. Somebody suggested Joe be put on the stand, too, just to give the boys an idea about that damned popgun of his.

"Quite a long drive," McIntyre objected. "One of my boys is pinged through the lung, and you know the kind of a road we have out to Mesquite. If necessary, I'll send his affidavit down later."

"That ain't necessary," the coroner-justice said. "Hit's jes' the boys is naturally curious about this yeah .22 used fo' business. Looks like kind of a new trick, somehow."

Naman stayed with Hucklem, but Captain McIntyre kept Joe with him, and the two rode northward toward the Ranger headquarters two days later. Ten miles on their way, winding over the trail, with no one within miles of them, the Ranger turned to Joe Baxter.

"Joe, you ain't told me how come you arrived jes' when you did."

"No, sir."

"Well, how the hell did it happen?"

"Why—uh-h—" Joe drew out the appointment Purt Alvorn had given him. Captain McIntyre let fall his reins and read every word.

"Well, go on with it," McIntyre ordered.

"Alvorn give it to me. He told me you'd gone down into the Jungle, lookin' for Obion's gang. He said I should go down right away to help you out—"

"And you come down there to help us out?"

"No, sir, Cap'n, not thataway." Joe shook his head.

"But you gave a damned big help, at that."

"I'd trapped down there, Cap'n," Joe said desperately. "I knew the runways and trails—I thought p'raps I might help find some of those back places. That's all, Cap'n."

Captain McIntyre put away the paper that appointed Joe Baxter a Ranger. Toward night, at a comfortable jog, they came to Birdsong where the Ranger telephoned his headquarters.

"Howdy, Alvorn," McIntyre greeted. "This is the cap'n. Much obliged for sendin' Ranger Joe Baxter down. You started him a good eighteen hours 'fore I even knowed I'd need him. You saw what happened? Now the private particulars are that Joe come in just when I had no more ammunition. Hucklem was shot through and was out, and Buck was creased. Joe picked off two fellers, then dropped a feller who was gittin' the drop on me from the brush, comin' close up. I stepped it off—sixty-five yards in a heavy rain with that .22. Hit 'im three times in the small of the back. He rousted Obion out the thicket, pepperin' him, so's I got a fair whack at him. Us three was done for, Alvorn, but for your notion. You've a pull down't Austin. I've an appointment of Joe to be Ranger, but I'm just a little perverted as to it. Pretty good names on it, course. You go down there and see if you can't get the equivalent of them names. On account of forgery—by Rangers—it's a kind of skittish prop'sition if it gets out."

"I read the papers, Cap'n," Alvorn said. "Don't tell Joe—but us boys'll sure 'pologize to him. I'm leavin' for Austin in ninety-five seconds, sir."

Joe started to pull west about fifty miles up the line. Captain McIntyre veered over that way with him, desiring, he said, to see the trapping country

Joe had claimed. Joe wanted to ride his lines, and the Ranger went with him and helped dress out more than a hundred dollars' worth of skins. In the main shack, Joe set up one of the best meals the Ranger had ever eaten.

"What are you takin' up the line for?" McIntyre asked.

"Fur begins to fade, rub and shed late in January," Joe said. "I don't catch anything but full primes."

"What you goin' to do now?"

"Run around."

"About that appointment to be a Ranger?"

"You've taken it back, Cap'n," Joe said sadly. " 'Course, that's accordin' to your authorities."

"How do you know that?"

"I've read in the newspapers, and some Ranger law, about when men are dropped from companies by the commissioned officers, sir."

"Uh-huh!" McIntyre grunted. "Better come through with me to my headquarters. You'll have to get a wagon to tote your outfit."

"I cache most of it. My packhorses are at your camp, though, and I'll ride in for them to bring out my fur."

A certain degree of restraint existed between the two as they rode toward the camp. Time had been when a Ranger captain could have appointed any one he desired. Now Austin claimed the privilege; and down here, lately, they were laying off Rangers because lots of people felt uneasy having such undiplomatic but persistent law enforcers around.

The two rode into Cedar Spot Springs. The squad was sitting around in picturesque, exaggerated appearance of indifference, but they came sauntering over as McIntyre threw his saddle over the pole and hung up his bridle. Baxter rode down the outlet to bring in his two packhorses. Alvorn handed the captain an envelop made of oiled silk. Inside was a sheet of fair paper about five by seven inches with a fair job of printing on it, filled in with ornate, copperplate writing. The signatures looked like a collection of first class Lone Star political autographs.

Captain McIntyre drew a similar sheet from his pocket and examined it. Several Rangers stood about, red behind the ears. Joe Baxter came up with his horses and swung down to walk over to the group. He was grinning and he had that absurd garter holster right where the .22 revolver butt was brushed by the swing of his hand. Joe was licking his lips nervously. He had never known what to expect in the five years that he had been coming to this camp of heroic men. Even now he could not imagine what was at hand.

Captain McIntyre handed him the paper. Joe looked at it and wiped the sweat from his brow. He was speechless, startled, and looked around as though he was ready to leg it for the brush. And then he gathered himself, shook down the rising tide of embarrassment and said, gently, as a Ranger would in a crisis—

"If you'd just as soon, Cap'n, I'd like to have that other 'pointment, too."

McIntyre was surprised, but brought the forgery out of his pocket. Joe folded it carefully into the envelop.

"Purt Alvorn—" he looked at the Ranger— "I just want to tell you I'm obliged for—that!"

Alvorn gasped.

"Look here, Joe," McIntyre demanded. "You don't mean to say you knew that one was no good?"

"If I hadn't known, you don't reckon I'd make a good Ranger, do you?" Baxter asked, still quietly. And then he added, "I know that Jungle, Cap'n. I've crawled through the thorns on my hands and knees. All I needed, knowin' it, was an excuse to get down there with you. Purt had me in mind to be a Ranger—even if only an imitation one. I hadn't ever thought myse'f even good enough to be a good Ranger joke—so I owe him plenty, Cap'n!"

"Thanks, Joe," Alvorn said. "But I ain't goin' to 'pologize, now!"

Clean, Wholesome Fun

A Story of the Sailormen

By F. R. BUCKLEY

"Seeing the Dog thus fondled, the Donkey thought he, too, would climb into his Master's lap. . ." —AESOP

FROM the dim but irreligious light of Captain Dyer's cabin—Captain Dyer had been ashore last night and was not feeling any too well—Mr. Castle emerged to the *Cetewayo's* bridge deck and for the first time saw Marseilles as a handsome town. For the past three months he had been viewing it as a hellhole; first from the window of a particularly lousy jail, and latterly —for lack of a ship to replace the departed *Maid of Perth*—from those sections of the city where soap is manufactured but not used, and the unwashed live on garlic and sour wine.

This was his first subsequent look at the town from the water, and the change was so astonishing as to react on Mr. Castle's physique. His sensitive nostrils, which had, so to speak, grown together in self-defense, now expanded; his large blue eyes regained something of their former cherubic expression; and his nicely chiseled lips, long clenched into a thin, tight line, began to move in what might have been thanks. For suddenly, unexpectedly, he was third mate of the *Cetewayo, vice* a Mr. Sampson who appeared to have met with an accident; and from somewhere there arose to the bridge a fragrance as of bacon and of coffee.

The large blue eyes becoming actually seraphic, young Mr. Castle put on his cap and slid down the rails of two ladders to breakfast.

Yes, yes. Here was the galley; two men in pairs of trousers that had once been white, doing Christian things to Christian food in frying pans. Here was the steward, handling white bread and synthetic raspberry jam as if they were everyday comestibles. And finally here

was the cuddy, beautifully furnished with a tablecloth and four men that spoke English.

Not that they seemed inclined to. Indeed, following the initial good morning, Mr. Castle had made his way through half a pound of bacon, eight eggs, one loaf and six cups of coffee before anybody spoke; and then it was the first officer; a circumstance calculated to endow any words with the minimum of cordiality. A beetle browed, blackavised person was Mr. Woods, who seemed to have mislaid several of his most visible teeth.

"You the new Third?"

"M'm," said Mr. Castle with his mouth full.

"Yeah," said Mr. Woods, eyeing the newcomer's knuckles. "I thought so. O Lord!"

He spat out a toothpick.

"Whatch' been doin' ashore?"

"Hunting a job."

"Dockwallopin'? Miss your ship? Whatch' outa?"

"Yeah. *Maid of Perth.*"

"How come?"

Mr. Castle reached for more bread. The golden light which, streaming through the porthole behind him, gave his golden hair the likeness of an aureole, likewise threw into relief a fine wrinkle of puzzlement between his brows and emphasized a hurt look in his singularly wide blue eyes. Under which conditions of lighting the second mate looked at the chief engineer and pretended to be sick; while the wireless operator, who weighed two hundred pounds even without his left eye, made a vague snoring noise expressive of contempt.

"Well," said Mr. Castle, ignoring these phenomena, "there was a fight—"

"With you in it?"

"Oh, no. I—"

"I thocht not," said the chief engineer.

"I went ashore with the first mate and a couple of other guys," said Mr. Castle, "and here on the sidewalk were all these Lascar stokers, scoopin' oysters out of the shells with their thumbs an' eatin' them—you know. In June, mind you—a month without an R in it."

"Oh, chase me, girls," said the second mate. "Yeah? And what then?"

Mr. Castle engulfed a sardine.

"Why, somehow or other," he said, "an argument sprang up, and the first thing I knew, here were these six or eight bicycle police, all over whiskers and revolvers and things—"

"Did they massage you?"

"No. I—"

"Did they arrest the other guys?"

"No. They—"

"There you are," said Mr. Woods to the other three. "Wasn't in the scrap, and didn't know enough to cut his lucky. That's what we would draw. Ain't it? Didn't I say so?"

"What do you mean?" asked the new Third.

The council of vultures brooded at this dove.

"I suppose," said the second mate, "you didn't happen to notice anythin' lyin' to the starb'd of us, in the next dock, didja? Kind of a mass of rust with a blue funnel?"

"The *Eagle?*"

"Yeah."

"Yes, but—"

"Well, see, ducky," said Mr. Woods heavily, "we don't like the *Eagle* crowd an', for some reason, they don't like us. So whenever we hit port together, which is often on account of them sneakin' around after us tryin' to grab charters, us'n' them's likely to have a little spat. That's what happened to the Third before you—a brick hit him. But you wouldn't care about that. Don't go in much for scrappin', do you?"

"Er—no."

"No. I thought not," said Mr. Woods. "That's why we were sayin', ducky, that we could ha' wished for another sort of Third. We could do with payin' them birds back for biffin' Sampson. But God's will be done."

Mr. Castle masticated; and as he did so he looked from one to another of his

brand new shipmates.

"I know better things to do ashore than to fight," he said diffidently.

"Yeah, an' you look as if you did. But me," said Mr. Woods, "I'm a married man, an'—"

"I don't mean that. I was just thinking, as I came below here," said Mr. Castle, "that I've been having kind of a slim time lately, and I can draw a couple weeks' pay in advance, and I'd like to pay my footing here, and I was going to ask you gents to come ashore tonight and—and have a bit of fun."

"Fun?"

"Yes," said the third mate. "Nice clean fun. Get the worries off our necks. I've had enough, lately, and judging by what you gentlemen just said, so have you. That's my idea of what to do in port—go out with a bunch and have a good dinner and a few drinks and sort of kid around—"

"You payin'," said the chief engineer, in the tone of one who provides for the future.

"Yeah. And just pass a pleasant evening. Just clean, wholesome fun."

THE chief officer looked at the wireless man; who in turn surveyed the chief engineer and the second mate. Among them, it is reasonable to suppose, there flashed by transference of thought the idea that, though convention demanded immediate revenge on the *Eagle,* there was something to be said for this new idea. Mr. Riach, though he would not have admitted it for worlds, was really in discomfort from his two broken ribs; the sockets of the first mate's teeth were still sore; and the wireless operator's kneecap, while not actually dislocated, did hurt every time it slipped around to the side of his leg. So it was the second mate who suggested that maybe an evening's truce would do all hands a bit of good.

"After all," he said, eyeing his prospective host with disfavor, "we might as well make *some* use of him. I'm on."

Mr. Castle, still eating, said nothing. Merely, he smiled; a wide smile at which Mr. Woods stared uncomprehendingly. As may have been indicated, there was not much smiling done aboard the *Cetewayo;* especially when the *Eagle* was in port.

"Aggh!" said Mr. Woods about nothing in particular. "Well. What time, then? Four bells?"

And, Captain Dyer having consented to nurse his headache and the ship alone, it was at six o'clock that the party started. The three deck officers, the wireless operator and the chief and second engineers marched lightsomely ashore and, in a dismal street of *cantines* and *bureaux de change,* took street car for the world famed *bouillabaisse* of Monsieur Pascal.

Which they were not to reach without incident; indeed incident which was to prevent the second engineer from continuing with the party at all. Furthermore, incident pathetic in its way; so utterly was its violence dependent on Mr. Machamer's desire to be lightsome for once, and the fact that the street car was equipped with an automobile horn.

Briefly, Mr. Castle, standing beside the motorman and pursuing his own ideas of amusement ashore, had been blowing this horn in various tempi; apparently to the motorman's delight. Which gave the second engineer the thought—though he was usually serious minded, not to say surly—that by stuffing more or less of one's hand into the instrument's bell and thus modifying its note, one might be able to play patriotic tunes, for instance; and he had actually got as far as "My country 'tis—" when he found his wrist grasped.

"Pardon," said the motorman with sternness. *"Ne touchez pas. C'est defendu."*

"He says," translated Mr. Castle, "that you're not allowed to play with it. *Defendu* means forbidden."

"Oh, yeah?" asked the second engineer.

He released himself with some violence. The motorman, who had a large chest and an eminent mustache, regarded him out of the corner of a hot, dark eye.

"Forbidden, eh? He wasn't forbiddin' you to monkey with it. What's the matter with me—am I a stepchild?"

He reached for the horn bulb and blew a sharp blast. The eye of the motorman fixed itself with ominous detachment on the road ahead; also his hand trembled on the detachable control handle.

"I guess," said the second engineer, "I paid my fare just the same's you did, an' I ain't goin' to be defendued any more'n anybody else. I've rung better horns'n this, an' no frog's goin' to stop me—"

He ended the sentence with another sharp blast.

"Tell him that," he requested Mr. Castle; but words, it appeared, were unnecessary.

The motorman had gathered the gist of Mr. Machamer's contention from his deeds; and now, his eye positively incandescent, he brought the car to a full stop and took the control handle off. Also, he said something in the French tongue.

"He wants to know," deputized the third mate, "whether you'll stop—"

"What's he aimin' to do with that crank handle?" asked the second engineer; and was enlightened.

For, asking, he had by instinct doubled his fist and dropped his right shoulder; and now the motorman, being a man of experience on that run, acted without hesitation and without mercy. The control handle, which was of bronze and may have weighed five pounds, swung upward, caught the second engineer on the point of the jaw and knocked him backward off the car into the very arms of a policeman. Who, after a shower of French from the motorman and the native passengers, sadly raised Mr. Machamer's limp wrists and handcuffed them.

"Hey, what—?" began Mr. Woods, rising. The officer looked at him.

"Reseat yourself," he said in English. "This one is arrest. If you leave the car *you* will be arrest. He has infracted the law. *Conducteur, continuez.*"

"But what you gonna do with him?" asked Mr. Castle; at sight of whom the policeman became several degrees less grim, though his grasp on the second engineer remained uncompromising. "He's hurt, and—"

"I shall take him to the Hospital of the Sick Child to be bandaged, and then to the police station. I treat him nice," said the officer, suddenly resting his eyes on Mr. Woods and the wireless man and becoming grimmer than ever, "but if your friends get out of the car, I blow my whistle, and we don't treat *anybody* nice. *Conducteur, continuez!*"

And so the party rattled on to the foot of the Rue Cannebière; just a hop, skip and a jump from the establishment of Monsieur Pascal; before sampling whose wares the chief engineer desired a drink. Young Mr. Castle would be paying for it, he pointed out; it would soothe their recent bereavement and give them a chance to think what might be done for the second engineer.

"We'd oughta rescued him first off," said the wireless man, ordering vermouth.

"An' got shot by yon gendarme? Na, laddie. Ah'm no more averrse to bein' killed than the next mon, but Ah'm o' a philosophic turn o' mind, an' there's no doubt that it was Machamer's *time* to be sluggit an' arrestit, if ye catch me. Mac's sailed wi' me fower years, an' Ah've seen him in fights wi'oot number —fights he'd gone oot lookin' for, moreover; an' never a scratch on him. Yet here he goes out for the firrst time in his life innocently, followin' the lead o' yon starry eyed youth—by the way, whaur is he?—an' comes to grief forthwith. Castle! Yer health, mon. Come ower here."

"He's found another friend," said Mr. Woods sepulchrally from his beer mug.

"An' what a one!" remarked the second mate.

"He's bringin' him over," said the wireless operator. "Hi, Woods! Turn round an' lookit, for Pete's sake! Sufferin' Judas, get a load of that spinach!"

AND it was indeed a whiskery Frenchman with whom Mr. Castle, smiling as usual, now turned from an asthmatic slot machine and approached the counter. He was a large citizen, this Monsieur Dubois, standing about six feet four inches in height; with shoulders and chest disproportionately broad and deep and—to mention once more his most vital feature—a truly stupendous set of whiskers. Combined with a vast beard and a gigantic mustache, these caused the visible face of Monsieur Dubois to give a general effect of rugged ruins buried in primeval forest and momentarily irradiated by sunshine. The sunshine was a smile, originally directed at Mr. Castle, but now including all hands.

"Enchant' to meet you, gentlemen," said Monsieur Dubois. "Your little friend, my God, how he play the machine! Six francs and fifty centimes he win for me. Everybody does me the pleasure to have a drink."

"Yes, and look at him!" said Mr. Castle delightedly. "Did you ever see anything like it anywhere?"

He rotated M. Dubois on his axis and, reaching considerably upward, pushed his head back.

"Did you ever in all your born puff," asked the third mate in the manner of a showman, "see such fungus? Of course, it's no trick to locate his nose and his cheekbones, but—say, open your mouth, Dubby. See where it is? I bet you'd never have guessed unless he'd shown you."

M. Dubois beamed on the company.

"A little nuts, eh, your friend, ain't he? Ha-ha! But a nice boy, eh? Not so? Ha-ha! Well—*santé!*"

"Santy," said Mr. Woods, raising a double brandy. "An' say—that's certainly one growth you got there. Christmas, what a bush!"

The smile of Monsieur Dubois chilled slightly. He said nothing, but drank.

"Must save y' a lot in razor blades," said the chief engineer. "But how d'ye get on when ye light a cigaret. Mon, either ye use a long holder or ye risk a prairie fire twenty times a day."

Monsieur Dubois set down his drink. His eye, flitting from Mr. Woods to the chief engineer, sought the familiar face of Mr. Castle; who chanced to have departed and to be exchanging pleasantries with the young lady at the cash desk.

"Are you married, musher?" asked the second mate with interest.

After several drinks in the afternoon, topped off with the present gin and Jamaica rum, he was feeling friendly for once, and strong in the Castle tradition.

"Is it of your affair?" asked Monsieur Dubois.

"Is it of— Oh. No. Only I was just wonderin' what the missus thought of 'em."

"Of what? *Pardon.* I—"

"The throat muff," explained the wireless operator, also in lighter vein, and making illustrative circles about his chin with his forefinger. "The fluff, the hay, the alfalfa, the excelsior. The mattress stuffing. You know. Suppose you kiss her, for instance. Don't it get in her eyes?"

Mr. Woods emitted a bark-like laugh; the chief engineer, the second mate and the wireless operator chuckled. Only Monsieur Dubois failed to smile.

"You mean my beard?" he inquired; at which all four of his audience burst into merry laughter.

It is but just to Mr. Castle, and to his ideas of an evening ashore, to say that it was months since the *Cetewayo's* afterguard had worked their diaphragms in this way; their shoregoing manner being usually prognathous if not imminently threatening, with the breath cautiously conserved against the chance of

battle. Now, opening their mouths, they indulged in mirth unrestricted; they roared; they bellowed; at the sound whereof Mr. Castle turned from his innocent flirtation and surveyed them benignly.

"Do we mean his beard!" gasped the second mate finally. "Oh, boys, that's a hot one! Do we mean his—Oh, Dubby, you'll be the death of me. Hold your head down like you was goin' to kiss somebody."

Monsieur Dubois stepped backward. Also, he said "Pardon!" for the second time, and in a tone which seemed to interest the bartender. He went away, did that *garcon*, and washed glasses at the extreme far end of the counter, his eyes fixed in fascination upon the second mate.

"Can y' imagine it?" demanded that gentleman. "Love in a mist. Oh, gosh, my ribs! Ha-ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha!" said Mr. Woods, in chorus with the chief engineer and Sparks. "Ha-ha—"

"Well, ne'er mind, Dubby," said the second mate, preparing to slap Dubois on the back, but instead pulling him playfully by the beard. "Come an'—"

Instantly Monsieur Dubois knocked him down. In another moment, tearing off his coat and displaying an open shirted chest more heavily upholstered even than his face, the striker was further inviting all and sundry foreign animals to come on, if they dared, and be made into jelly.

It appeared—in a loud voice—that he was a captain commanding the *Marie Louise* of Brest, a vessel of four masts; a man of spotless private life, who had been four times torpedoed, twice decorated and twice mutilated for his country; and the possessor of a beard which, they should understand, was his beard and not a target for the jests of strangers.

Mr. Castle came hurrying.

"You I don't mind!" roared Monsieur Dubois. "You mock yourself of me in fun, isn't it? You—"

"Well, they don't mean anything, either."

"They are camels!"

"No, they're not. Honest. They—"

"My beard is my beard!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Castle, smiling sympathetically.

"It's yours, all yours, from the follicles to the pinnacles, and nobody—"

M. Dubois' fists were just unclenching; the veins on his forehead were just beginning to return beneath the skin; the beard of contention had just begun, under the infection of Mr. Castles' grin, to heave in its depths with the stirrings of a sympathetic smile, when the second mate recovered consciousness and hurled himself upon the man who had knocked him down.

Altogether, it was an unfortunate affair.

In the first place, the mate, setting forth for a Sunday school evening, had omitted to bring his knuckle-dusters—ordinarily more a part of his costume than his trousers. Then again, of all the cafés in Marseilles, this one chanced to be the hangout of all the sailing ship men in port. Of whom—by still further evil chance—Monsieur le Capitaine Dubois chanced to be dean, mayor, syndic or podesta. He also chanced to be stronger even than he looked, and more insensitive to blows; while his friends, crew and relations, emerging from various dark corners, telephone booths and such-like, proved as ferocious as they were numerous.

It was evident, too, that they had not come ashore for an evening of clean, wholesome fun on the Castle plan. Half of them had belaying pin keepsakes, and the other half carried rope colts well ballasted at the knotend. Both of which weapons they seemed eager, if not actually determined, to try on impolite foreigners.

"Don't strike my friend!" thundered Monsieur Dubois, indicating Mr. Castle by hurling the second mate past him. "For the rest—death to the beard pullers! *En avant!*"

AND then after all it was not such an epic battle; being spoiled, so to phrase it, by its own promise. Certainly the Café Brewery of the Frigate at Full Speed was utterly wrecked, from its mirrors to its ice buckets, whereof one had to be removed from a French boatswain's head by a blacksmith; admittedly, the young lady at the bar lost her false hair, thus giving rise to reports of a scalping outrage; and certainly the chief engineer, taking even peace and good will with a grain of salt, did chance to have a pipe wrench up his vest; but for all these things, it was no great shakes of a fight.

Even at the best of it—before Mr. Riach's weapon got too slippery to handle and before Mr. Woods' iron table became a broken reed in his hands—the *Cetewayans* recognized this war as one in which the noblest victory would be mere escape; to which end they therefore dedicated their endeavor. Laying about them as well as they could—Mr. Woods with a carafe in his right hand and a belaying pin in his left—they therefore retreated steadily to the door; where with almost childish candor they dropped everything and ran.

It was nine o'clock before they reached Monsieur Pascal's; and it was just as they entered his portals that they noticed the absence of the second mate and Sparks. What with police patrols and emergency detachments of firemen and back alleys that led suddenly into brightly lighted main streets, they had been under quite a strain.

"We must ha' left 'em lyin' about the floor somewhere," said the chief engineer, wiping a two-inch cut on the tablecloth. "But Ah'm no' goin' back for them. If the police want to come here an' tak' me, they may; but it's as far's Ah'll go in the matter. Bring me a large brandy, waiter, an' gie the check to yon gentleman wi' the curls."

"Ditto for me," growled Mr. Woods. "An' some bullybase. Tell 'em to take the fish's eyes out, will ya? They'd remind me of poor Johnston's when the mirror fell on him."

"The eyes of the fish—" began the waiter.

"Fly your kite!" roared Mr. Woods. "An' bring a—bring three bottles of wine. Liters . . . That's two more teeth I lost."

"An' puir Johnston," said the chief engineer. "Ye'll no seek him?"

"Did you seek your second engineer? Naw, he borried my razor an' gave it back blunt, an' anyhow my religion's against suicide."

"And then it was his own fault," said Mr. Castle sadly, "pulling the man's beard that way. They're awfully sensitive about their—"

"He was only kiddin' him," said the chief officer savagely. "Think he'd ever have mucked with a great big yahoo like that, in a windjammer hangout, if he'd been lookin' for trouble? No, he saw you playin' statues with the great ape, an' he thought he could. Say, you didn't get much hurt, didja? Fresh as a rose."

"It was the same wi' puir Machamer," said the chief engineer. Absently, he took off his brandy at a gulp. "No built for jocosity, that was him; an' led away by a bad example. Why, Ah've seen that man, when he was actin' like himself—"

And so on with *bouillabaisse;* with more brandy; with the three bottles of wine; with three more bottles of wine, and yet another three—until ten o'clock, when Monsieur Pascal presented his bill and his reasons for wishing to close. And when Mr. Woods, jolted out of his forwardness by a liqueur resembling hellfire, demanded when anybody was going to have some of this fun he'd heard about.

"I dowany more fightin'," said the chief officer, taking Mr. Castle's hand in both of his and patting it. "I wanna do somep'n innocent. Daisy chains. I ain' equipped for fightin' tonight. Left my spike' boo's at home. *You* know. Laid aside the sword an' taken up the

shoughplare. Innocen' fun. Thass me. Where's innocent fun? You promised me innocent fun, Castle, you this that an' the other thing. Now you produce. Riach, am I right?"

The chief engineer nodded. He nodded a great many times; which, considering that he was afflicted with a slight astigmatism and that liquor always made him close one eye, endowed him with an owl-like expression very interesting to the *agent* on the corner of the Cannebière. The policeman distrusted sailors who closed one eye, even if, from the circumstance of their being in the Cannebière, it was inconceivable that these three sailors were the same as had wrecked the café. Wherefore he followed—up the Cannebière, up the Allées de Meilhan, around the corner of the Reformed Church, and down a side street to a broad thoroughfare dark as to windows, yet gay with festoons of red lights fringing an excavation.

"Port lights," said Mr. Woods of these latter. "Navy at anchor. I painted it. Whoopee!"

His voice rang against the shutters of the bourgeoisie. In the shadow the policeman investigated the catch of his revolver case, put his baton where it would be handiest and twirled his mustache.

"You know ole sea poem?" reverberated Mr. Woods. A light appeared at a window.

"If on your starboard red appear,
It is your duty to keep clear—
To act as juzh—juzhmen'—ment says is proper—"

"I know it," said Mr. Castle.

"Every young officer should know it," said Mr Woods "Fine ole sea poem. I wrote it. Hey, I'm not havin' any fun. I wammy innocent fun!"

Mr. Castle looked around him; and, as another window bloomed amid the sere propriety of that street, gave birth to an inspiration.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "You know the Rue Paradis?"

"No," said the chief engineer emphatically. "We're married men, Mr. Woods an' me, an' anyhoo—"

"Innocent fun," said the chief officer, laying a grieved hand on Mr. Castle's shoulder. "Clean, wholesome—"

"I know," said his junior, "but what I mean—"

WHICH is how it came to pass that Agent Bilenc witnessed the strange spectacle of three men, obviously old enough to understand the meanings of things, taking red lanterns from that excavation and hanging them over the most respectable doorways of Marseille. Of the three, the short squat one who staggered most likewise fixed the most lanterns—four; on the houses of two wine merchants, a viscount and a senator. The next tallest culprit affixed only one; and the tallest of all—a lad of singularly open countenance and with large blue eyes—was but on the doorstep of the Baroness de la Meillaie when Agent Bilenc accosted him.

With an exceedingly pleasant manner and every appearance of frankness, this one gave his name as J. P. Morgan, and his address as aboard the United States battleship *Horsefeathers*. He added that he was engaged on a quip, or joke.

"But—" said Agent Bilenc, covering his mouth with a large hand.

"But!" said Mr. Castle in astonishment. "'But' from a policeman of this city! And an old soldier, too, I know. Aren't you?"

The policeman nodded. Also he removed his hand and revealed the beginnings of a grin.

"But, look you—"

"There you go again," said Mr. Castle. "But, but, but, the boys are butting. Fight against it, Pierre. You know what caused the depression. That one little word. 'But'. Tragic, that's what it is. *Tragique*, comprenny? *Ce mot—*"

"What's goin' on here?" demanded Mr. Woods' voice thickly; at which Agent Bilenc ceased to smile and

hitched his pistol case a little nearer to the front.

"What's this guy want?" demanded the first mate.

"Nothing," said Mr. Castle. "He just—"

The policeman laid hand gently on the third officer's arm. Pushing him indulgently on one side and laying his other hand lightly on the butt of his pistol, Agent Bilenc took a step forward and confronted Mr. Woods.

"Pardon," he said to Mr. Castle; and then in another tone, "You are aware, sir, that you are in contravention?"

"Oh, yeah?" asked Mr. Riach, arriving.

"I was not addressing myself to you!"

There was a pause of considerable tension, during which several more windows lighted and the baroness, sticking her head into view, demanded what it had out there outside, by example; and particularly what it was that one made with a red lantern at her doorway, wasn't it not?

"Well, addressin' yourself to me, then," asked Mr. Woods, "what are you goin' to do about it?"

"Listen, Sergeant," broke in Mr. Castle. "I'll tell you. We've been at sea a long time, see, and we came ashore tonight, and maybe we had a couple of drinks—"

Monsieur Bilenc twirled his mustache and once more the corners of his mouth twitched.

"That sees itself," he murmured.

"And this street looked so respectable, we just kind of got the idea it'd stir things up some to—"

The policeman's eyes flickered over the red illuminated mansions and his smile grew.

"Just a little joke!" said Mr. Castle, patting him on the shoulder.

"For which we get twenty years in the pen, I guess," growled Mr. Woods.

"It is a matter for three months at forced works!" snapped Agent Bilenc, repeating his forward step. "And—"

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yes!" snapped Agent Bilenc.

"Says you. A little joke—"

"Listen!" said Agent Bilenc dangerously. "A little joke, for the young boy here, is one thing, isn't it not; but for you it is another, I assure you. Therefore abstain yourself, or I take you in guard. There! Now, for example!"

"Listen—" urged Mr. Castle, but Monsieur Bilenc was not occupied with him and said so.

The fine old traditions of the Marseilles police and the 322nd Regiment of Infantry (*Croix de Guerre* with palm, *Medaille Militaire* and four mentions in dispatches) all boiling within him, Agent Bilenc was concentrated on these who defied him; and whom—in answer to a question by Mr. Riach—he announced himself capable of arresting single handed.

Which, in reply to a sneer from Mr. Woods, he forthwith proceeded to do.

Really, he was an unpleasant man, Agent Bilenc; or it may have been that the street excavation, into which he and his two playmates fell at the beginning of their argument, reminded him of a trench. Anyhow, from first to last of that darkling scuffle he behaved with a disregard of humanity and a knowledge of ju-jitsu which left Mr. Woods and Mr. Riach at first figuratively, and then actually, breathless.

It was unfair, in a way, because after the Dubois affair Mr. Riach had resolved to lead a new life; and for this reason—also because it might be found on him—had thrown away his pipe wrench. While Mr. Woods, though willing and powerful, was by no means as accurate with his punches as he was when a little soberer. It was indeed he who caught Mr. Riach under the ear and knocked him clucking; a feat which, leaving him off balance, made him an easy prey to the knee which Agent Bilenc shoved violently into his face, and the gun barrel brought down by the same party on the back of his neck.

"So there, camels!" observed the victor in his own tongue. "And now a lit-

tle handcuff—"

Climbing, a ragged and excessively muddy figure, out of the excavation, he paused at sight of Mr. Castle.

"You had better go," said Agent Bilenc. "I whistle for assistances."

"But—"

"No 'but'," said Agent Bilenc with a ghostly grin. "Blow me the breeze. Look you, I have been a boy. You are a boy. I understand. Others have not been boys. The commandant of the patrol has not, my God, so go. Quick!"

"But my friends!"

"Disassociate yourself," said Agent Bilenc gravely. "They are malefactors. You can visit them in the lockup tomorrow—and better bring your consul. Now save yourself! Quick!"

"You couldn't kind of overlook it?"

"I am overlook for you because you are young and polite," said Agent Bilenc, whistle at lips, "but if you argue more, name of a pipe, I—"

SO WHILE Messers Riach and Woods lay cursing feebly in a cell of the third district *violon,* Mr. Castle walked, free but in a low state of mind, along the quay at whose far end lay the *Cetewayo*. She was dark; depressingly dark; but at the next pier the Blue Funnel Line S. S. *Eagle* presented a spectacle most grateful to a young man defrauded of his first sociable evening in three months, and interrupted in his drinking just before confusion of the faculties had turned to hilarity. Alone among the ships in sight, the *Eagle* gave signs of being inhabited; its afterguard was not only awake but—judging by the flitting of shadows across lighted ports—having a swell time in its quarters. Mr. Castle's heart yearned for companionship.

Always a young man of expansive impulses, and with a simple confidence now fortified by Graves Superériur, he suddenly saw that it was absurd for the *Eagles* and the *Cetewayans* to be at enmity; or at least ridiculous for him to be left lonely by a feud in which he had borne no part. He had hardly concluded this chain of thought before he was on the bridge deck of the *Eagle,* looking into a chartroom full of officers deep in the discussion of something.

To whose number Mr. Castle suddenly found himself added in a kneeling—and later, sprawling—position. A red headed Swede, posted at the gangway to safeguard the conference, had followed him barefoot, opened the charthouse door and pushed him in.

"What the—?" demanded four of the *Eagle's* officers in full.

"Listenin'," said the red headed Swede. "New third mate off de *Cetewayo,* I tank."

"I was not listening, either!" said Mr. Castle. "I'd only just got here, and—"

"Yeah?" asked the *Eagle's* chief officer. "An' why did you come?"

"Yeah—whatch' want here?" demanded a greasy man with two black eyes. "Huh?"

Mr. Castle thought fast. He always thought fast in social matters, but the officers of the *Eagle* were of a physiognomy which stimulated him. Much on the type of the *Cetewayo* crowd, they ran rather more to the hungry looking; to the unshaven and wolfish; and then again there was their strange habit of leaving wheel wrenches, blackjacks and spiked knuckle-dusters lying in full view on the charthouse table. Feeling that any failure in charm might be disastrous, Mr. Castle drew a deep breath and took refuge in simplicity.

"I wanted you all to come ashore and have a drink."

The five *Eagles* concentrated their gaze upon him.

"Woods send you here?" asked the second mate.

"No."

"I don't believe Woods *did* send him," announced the captain, sitting down to do his staring. "Nobody'd dare— Say, you. Where is Woods? An' Riach an' the others?"

Mr. Castle thought rapidly again.

"They're—" he swallowed—"out. I've

been on the beach for three months and, getting this ship today, I figured on blowing them to a nice little evening ashore—having fun, you know—"

The greasy man laughed contemptuously.

"A fine chance of interestin' them in that," said he. "Two quarts of coonyac each an' a brick in a stockin'—that's their idea of fun. So they left you flat, did they? Haw-haw!"

Mr. Castle nodded. After all, he had been left flat; in the shank of the evening, too. One friend in the hospital; two more missing, their fate unknown, and two in the brig—had any man been left flatter than he?

"So I saw you were all awake-o," he said, "and I thought I'd come up and see if you'd care to come along."

"With that gang waitin' on the dark pier for us?"

"I don't believe they are," said the captain. His eyes, only a little more watery than they should have been, had not left Mr. Castle's face. "I think he's kosher, boys."

He got up and absently slipped a blackjack in his pocket.

"I useter be a boy like this myself," said the master with a slight hiccough, "an' it's years since I had any innocent fun ashore, an' I like his face—all of it—an' I believe in him, an' I'm goin' with him. You guys can come if you like. Or stay home if you don't like. It'd do you good, though. Just have a drink an' chat with the natives an' fool around an' laugh—ain't that it, kid?"

"Sure," said Mr. Castle eagerly. "We'll just—"

The captain swept a commanding but unsteady hand around.

"Go put on ties, you bunch of toughs," he said, "an' come along. We'll have a snort in my room before we go, an'—"

It was a strong snort, and there were several of them; and Mr. Castle, descending the *Eagle's* gangplank with his new friends, was conscious of a gentle melancholy. The chief officer was so like poor Woods, who hadn't been able to get on with that amiable cop; the captain, though lacking an accent, was heart-rendingly similar to Riach; and of the three of the other officers, two put one in loving memory of Sparks and the second engineer.

Mr. Castle brooded over the fate of his shipmates; and his mind went back to other parties—other little jaunts ashore which had ended in tragedy. That last one, which had lost him the *Maid of Perth* and landed two of the *Maid's* crew in hospital—all that had come from his harmless idea of washing a Lascar in the harbor and seeing what color he'd turn out. Then there had been that little spree in Port Said, when the captain broke his leg and the ship had been attached for fifteen plate glass windows, damaged by having a cab driven through them. Again, the business at Casablanca when he, Castle, had kidded a merchant into exhibiting his harem, and it had proved necessary to call out two companies of infantry to save the lives of the second and third engineers. All nice little quests for innocent fun, spoiled by the failure of Mr. Castle's companions to . . .

"What we gonna do?" asked the greasy man, shifting a monkey wrench morosely from his trousers to his breast pocket. "Because there's one thing I wanna say. I'm a married man, myself, an' I ain't gonna—"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Castle. "I don't mean anything like that. I mean just a party like I took Woods and Riach and the rest on—I mean like I was goin' to take 'em on, only—"

He turned, and in the radiance of a cargo light his frank young face beamed on the lowering *Eagles.*

"You know what I mean," said young Mr. Castle. "Just clean, wholesome fun!"

A Story of the Zeppelin Raiders

When a Man *Feels Tragic*

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

CAPTAIN HALLE, one of Germany's youngest Zeppelin commanders, paced the mess hall at Königsberg and remarked that he felt tragic. A dozen fellow officers, chairs pushed back, sipped red wines and puffed after-dinner cigars. They gave Halle a slight bit of attention; and somebody even wanted to know how it felt to feel tragic.

"It is hard to explain," the young airship commander told them. "Maybe it is what our Yankee friends call the hunch. Or perhaps it amounts to an oversupply of premonition. At any rate, to be brief, I seem to sense that something is going to happen."

Those present laughed long and loud. Of all places for a man with a premonition that something was going to hap-

pen! There in the lighter-than-air service of a country at war, when was there a day or an hour when something wasn't happening? And above all, Halle was the man to whom most of those quick things seemed to happen. His turn of service with the big bags had been anything but dull. Halle was able, reckless, willing. And because he was the latter—willing—the higher-ups seemed to give him all the chances on earth to be reckless. He seemed never to lack dangerous missions.

An orderly came into the mess hall, handing a telegram to Captain Stettin. The latter was commanding the base. He read, then called:

"Captain Halle, is your ship ready for duty?"

Halle, standing, reported that his craft, the *LZ-99,* was O.K.

"You are to depart the Baltic patrol," Stettin made known. "There is work in the Balkans for your ship. Sail out this evening."

It was early August, 1916. There was good daylight left, so the *LZ-99* would get underway. It was nearly two thousand miles to the mission's end, Jamboli, Bulgaria. There was a Zeppelin base there.

The meteorological service gave Captain Halle a promise of fair weather. He'd have a tail wind to Munich. Then he'd swing east over Austria and Hungary. Thence down the Danube to Bulgaria. So, shortly after seven o'clock, the station's handling crew walked the *LZ-99* from her shed.

Her crew of seventeen, officers and men, was aboard; and at 7:20 the *LZ-99* was turned loose. But as she swelled from the ground a mighty yell went up with her. Hearts froze. Two of the ground crew were tangled in her dangling bow line. The first of those two men fell when the *LZ-99* was two hundred feet up, and the second went back to the ground from three hundred feet before anybody could make a move. It was a bad start. Death at the take-off. Halle felt tragic.

Captain Halle flew a course via Berlin, and reached that city at 11:30. South of the Elbe, at 12:30, a Summer storm pounced upon the ship. It hit almost without warning. There was lightning; and that's bad when men are flying a hydrogen filled ship.

The *LZ-99* was forced up by the storm. The craft was heavy, for Halle had taken her out just as she stood, all serviced for Baltic patrol. Her bomb racks carried six thousand five hundred pounds of bombs. Her fuel tanks were all full. Water ballast, however, was quite light, owing to the August heat and its attending light, non-buoyant air. And now, going up in an effort to get above a storm that seemed to reach right down to the ground, Captain Halle was forced to drop much of the water ballast.

He had no second choice, for it was hardly the place to toss away any of his bomb load. Still and all, with the water dropped, the *LZ-99* was making a poor fight of the thing. The man with the tragic premonitions must have wondered if this wasn't his unlucky day, or night. That is, Halle must have done some thinking along those lines, if Halle was at all superstitious. And where's the airman who isn't?

One A.M. found them still fighting that storm. The ship's altitude was then eight thousand feet; and she couldn't win another inch without dropping men, motors or munitions. Water—all the water—had been dropped by then. Nearly a ton of fuel had gone by the board, too. And the greater part of the ship's small munitions—machine gun fodder—had been tossed out. The craft was taking a hellish mauling. Lightning was playing around her every foot of the way.

All her metal parts, as was usual with Zeppelins in such storms, were alive and aglow with electricity. All her crew could do was fight ahead, and wait for the crack of doom that would send them down. All record of the ship's likely position had been lost. The compass was a crazy, bobbing thing.

At 1:20 there was a flash and a crash that shook the *LZ-99* from bow to rudder. That one had struck the ship! There could be no two ways about it. Lieutenant Beers, Halle's second-in-command, had been standing at the rear of the control car, looking aft. He pointed, all alarm.

"The bombs!" he yelled. "They are dropping!"

Burbach, the bombing officer, rushed to Beers' side. Burbach yelled that, of course, there were no fuses in the bombs. But hardly were the words out of his mouth when three rapid and heavy roars came up through the night. There were fuses in three of those bombs.

Burbach looked like a man whose time was up. Something in his department had gone wrong. Fuses should never have been left in those bombs. It was up to him, officer in charge of bombing, to see to it that such accidents could not happen. Now it had happened.

One of Burbach's men came to the head of the leading-down ladder. He saluted Burbach, who moved that way to meet him. The man reported that the dropping apparatus had been hit, and fused. All but two bombs had fallen. These two remaining had jammed.

The *LZ-99*, with that quick loss of five thousand, five hundred pounds, had taken altitude. She went to eleven thousand feet. In a flash she was above the storm, and all eyes looked down upon a cloud-sea flooded with moonlight.

Twenty or thirty miles away, standing above the storm in the bright moonlight, were the tops of the Ore Mountains; and the *LZ-99* had reestablished her position. It was as though no storm had existed.

BY THREE o'clock the storm was behind them, and the lights of Nuremberg were to starboard. Then, at 3:10 A.M, the wireless operator handed Captain Halle a message just picked up. It was from the admiralty wireless station. Halle read, and bit down hard. He then handed the wireless to Burbach. The wireless said that the bombs had landed in Plauen, killing twenty Germans and causing thousands of marks' damage. A full report was demanded by the admiralty.

Burbach went a little whiter. He was near a half open aft window. He reached back and dropped the sash to its full opening. Then he saluted Halle, said he was sorry and was gone.

It was decided to land the *LZ-99* at Munich for more fuel and a general mechanical checking-up. And at five o'clock the ship came to a landing in that city. But a new communication was handed to Halle. He was to stop at Budapest, Hungary, there to pick up seven officers of the High Command. This was good. Anything to forget Plauen. Shortly after seven o'clock the *LZ-99* was on her way. Vienna saw her pass over at ten o'clock; and the rest of the run, a hundred and fifty miles, was made before noon had arrived.

The great General Hoffmann and his six companions were on the field, and ready to board the *LZ-99*. Old Herr Hoffmann was famous as a hater of all things that flew. Halle and his officers wondered why the old boy wanted to use a Zeppelin now. But in a military manner, Halle and his mates stepped down from the car and reported themselves and ship for duty—at the general's pleasure. The general acknowledged the salutes, studied the *LZ-99* from end to end and said:

"Airships! Phfff! How do we get in, Captain?"

Ten minutes later the *LZ-99* was quitting the ground again. As soon as they were underway General Hoffmann said:

"Captain, we will fly to Salonika. Know where it is? In the Aegean, one hundred and eighty miles west of the Dardanelles. Salonika, Captain, and as soon as this damnable contraption can reach that sweltering city . . . Airships! Phfff!"

Salonika—some destination! It was an enemy port, and hard pressed by the

German army. Herr Hoffmann merely wanted to get a good air view of what was holding Salonika in place, against that German army of his. There was lots of hard travel ahead, so Halle turned to his maps. But maps didn't cover the Serb country very well. In no time at all General Hoffmann was hanging over the maps with Captain Halle.

"Here's where we wish to go," he explained. "There are many Serb settlements in the mountains that are damaging our cause. I wish to study this back country, this country that feeds our enemy, via the Adriatic ports, with wheat, cattle, horses and timber. It is quite possible that your airships can harass these mountains. Fly there."

Captain Halle was more than willing to fly there, even though it was over the wild, unmapped country to the south. It was over hot, mountainous terrain. Midafternoon found them south of the Sava. At seven thousand feet elevation they were fighting the heat bumps, and the *LZ-99's* cargo would allow no greater ceiling. All of the staff group, except the general, were airsick. Four o'clock found the ship above the Drina Valley; and Herr Hoffmann was seeing some part of what he had come to see. The *LZ-99* had those two bombs in her racks.

The general showed Halle where he wanted those bombs placed on a small town called Lozinca. But, upon learning that the *LZ-99* carried only two bombs, the old general was filled with wonderment. Two bombs—only two? Then he connected the *LZ-99* with Plauen and the reports that had come to him at Budapest last night. Halle had to admit all; and General Hoffmann went sour on him. A blunder ship! Killers of their own people!

But the bombs were dropped on Lozinca. General Hoffmann and his staff watched. Because of the wrecked bombing apparatus, the two were hand dropped. And they missed. The general said, "Airships! Phfff!" Captain Halle felt like agreeing; and he felt tragic, too.

Sarajevo, a good sized junction city, was to starboard at six o'clock. It was an important city in the Allied scheme of things. The old general wanted bombs as he'd never wanted anything before. But there were none to be had, so the tragic captain, with tail dragging low, turned his ship a bit to the east. From here she'd follow the high hump southeastward to Salonika, three hundred miles away.

All the way, through the long evening, General Hoffmann was busy with his observations. He missed nothing. Now and then he'd jerk his reluctant staff officers to their feet, pointing out this and that. In spite of the heat, visibility was good. But now and then the sway and yaw of the craft made observations difficult. When 7:20 ended her first full day on this mission, the *LZ-99* was nearing the Kosovo Polye high country.

Nis, an important, four-way railroad junction of twenty-five thousand population, demanded General Hoffmann's immediate attention. He found it on the map, some fifty miles to the east of their course, and told Herr Halle to swing off in that direction. Swinging eastward, the *LZ-99* was once more running before a tail wind. She cut down the distance in much less than thirty minutes. Nis is on the Juz Morava River. It is on the rail line running from Belgrade to Salonika. Also, the rail runs from Nis, over the mountains, to the Adriatic Sea. Then there's a line that goes southeast into Bulgaria; and another cutting off to the northeast.

Nis was important, for Nis was close to Sofia and the German troops that were crowding Salonika from the north. It was also well garrisoned. Gothas and Zeppelins had been in there before, coming over from Jamboli and Sofia. Now, though, those air raiders always found a hot reception awaiting their arrival. For that reason, Herr Hoffmann must see what was holding Nis in place. Maybe the *LZ-99* would give him just the view he needed.

NOW they came over to Nis at a time of day when atmospheric changes were in order. Off on the west slope, toward the Adriatic, the Balkan world still sweltered. To the east of Nis, on the lower plains of Bulgaria, the cool of evening was creeping into the land. That hot, rising air in the west has to be replaced by cold air coming from some place. As is the law in such countries, that cooler air was moving, rushing through the valley of the Juz Morava and northwest into the valley of the Zap Morava. All this windy talk doesn't seem to have much to do with the story, or with the coming *LZ-99*. But if the *LZ-99*, and other airships, could know just what to expect in winds, well, high life would be easier for them. And they'd be airships just so much longer.

Sarajevo had unquestionably warned Nis by wireless or via railroad telegraph. Maybe by both. The *LZ-99's* wireless operator had been trying to pick up a strange code that was coming in with a snap. At any rate, Nis was ready and waiting for the enemy longboat. But Nis wasn't satisfied to wait right in Nis. The first shots to reach out and pot the *LZ-99* came up from the little town of Prokupije. This mild mountain town with the hard name is about fifteen miles west of Nis.

A body of Chasseurs, with some light pieces along, had stationed themselves on the high humps above Prokupije. And they were in the timber, under perfect cover. Their fire peppered the *LZ-99*. Nobody knew that the party was on till one of the staff officers, a tall captain, fell face down on the floorboards of the control car. Even then, for a few seconds, nobody guessed that the man hadn't fainted. It was Halle who reached down, turned the man over, and uncovered a pool of blood spreading on the floor. The dead man was carried aloft.

A telephone came from the aft port-side engine gondola. The engineer said that his propeller had been hit. Just tipped, he said. There was a hole in the ship's envelop, the man added, where the slug had ricocheted from the propeller and gone up. There was a heavy vibration on the splintered propeller. It would have to be stopped.

There was another telephone call from the catwalk. The chief rigger reported a balloonette losing its hydrogen. He might be able to stop the leak. It looked like a gunshot leak, the rigger wished to say.

By then, even as he talked, Captain Halle had dumped more than two tons of water ballast. The *LZ-99* was on her way up. But she wasn't pawing for her ceiling quite as fast as were the bullets from below. And she wasn't getting away from the worst of that strafing. The light mountain guns were using shrapnel, with time fuse. And they had the burst timed to a nicety, working with results that were telling. Lieutenant Beers and the chief rigger, together with the bomb crew, were aloft in the bag. They kept Halle advised of the damage, as checked. And the shrapnel and rifle shot had hit and holed half a dozen of the *LZ-99's* balloonettes. Two fuel tanks had been hit, luckily by the shrapnel instead of the incendiary shots that were tracing their smoky paths through and around the ship. Machine gun fire!

"Bombs! If we had bombs now!" one of the staff officers was yelling, adding insult to injury and making life worse for Halle.

And young Halle was handling just about as much of a given slice of life as any young man could handle under the circumstances.

"Bombs!" that loud staff stiff was yelling again. "If this ship only had its quota of bombs, we could—"

His out-of-turn and out-of-place tirade was cut short and punctuated by a shrapnel burst that was all too close. So close was it that some of the scattering shot tore through the control car; and the helmsman had made his rendezvous among those Germans for whom the war had already ended. Captain

Halle stood astride the fallen man, handling the wheel and calling his orders to the wireless man who had quit his small cabin. Then a telephone came down from Beers. Beers said that the burst of shrapnel had carried away the entire bomb rack, and one man. The wireless man relayed that news at the top of his voice.

"Bombs!" old General Hoffmann wailed. "Bombs be damned! All hands would be dead now if there'd been bombs in that rack . . . Fly her up, Herr Halle! Fly her up! You are doing a soldier's piece of work. Fly her up!"

But there was no flying her up. Instead, the *LZ-99* was now dropping altitude; and the strafing fire was following, holding her in an awful manner. Relaying Halle's spoken orders, the wireless man had phoned each gondola, telling the machine gunners to toss their outfits overside. Only the topside guns remained. The last of the water ballast had rained down, and all food was chucked through the shutters. The order was to jettison all movable things; and those reachable things had been moved in short order. Even the fuel from the tanks that had been hit was dropped, though the leaks might have been plugged.

And in spite of it all the long ship dragged lower and lower.

But she had passed out of the killing fire. At least, she was beyond the heavy part of that shelling. Stray, segregated gunners all the way between the two towns still caught her staggering course, never giving the stricken ship a moment of real respite. Her headway was slow.

Just beyond Nis, in view of the ship, was Bulgaria and possible safety. Captain Halle, if enough weight could be disposed of, might reach that allied country and even make Sofia. So deciding, he made no further attempt to win altitude. If he could just hold what he had then! If he could circle Nis wide enough to prevent another shower of lead and shrapnel! If he could manage those two things the *LZ-99* might yet come to rest on friendly soil. And, with Bulgaria won, the general and staff would really be just about where they wished to go. At least, they'd be within a reasonable distance of the German army and the path that led to Salonika.

THEN, with that decided, the *LZ-99* poked her nose over the east brink of a ridge that looks down on the deep Juz Morava Valley. It was at a point half a dozen miles north of Nis. As before said, the cool evening air out of the east was flowing, rushing up that valley. When a current follows in between high hills in that manner, there is nearly always a "throw down" of air on the hills to either side. It is in keeping with the principle of vacuum: empty and fill, outflow and suction. The suction had it! Down went the bow of the *LZ-99*, down with the throwdown of tumbling air. Down into a high, mountainside pasture. And before Halle could make a move, or give an order, the bottom of the control car had poked its way into a buffer of thick, low spruce.

Without orders, the three engine men killed their power and saved the propellers. Halle valved off hydrogen, thus making sure that the *LZ-99* would stay where she was. Crewmen, quick to size up a fast situation, were dropping, grabbing lines and snagging on to whatever they could reach—rocks, stumps and scrub trees. The *LZ-99* was fast. In that little meadow, under the lee of the high dome above, there was no wind. It was the first bit of luck that had come the way of Halle and company in quite some time. What's more, the ship was in one piece.

But Halle and company, including six members of a very high ranking imperial body, were in a tight place. Below them were the river, trail and railroad, all crowding through the pass together. It wouldn't be long before searchers were coming out of Nis. The *LZ-99* could be seen for miles. Total darkness was yet far ahead. There was work to

be done, or all hands to be surrendered to the enemy.

One brace of machine guns—those atop the bag—remained. Not much of a battery with which to fight off the approaches of a wild enemy. However, Captain Halle ordered the platform men to stay up there and be ready All others made their way to the ground, and to work.

The bow was down. The tail was free of the hillside. The aft starboard gondola was pretty badly jammed, with its struts twisted. The unit would be of no more use, as far as the present mission figured. The opposite motor, portside aft, was already out of commission with its bullet shattered propeller. Halle and crew had one out: drop those two motors. Drop the two, gondolas and all, and the *LZ-99* would be lighter by all of three thousand pounds. Then, perhaps, leave a few members of the crew. With any kind of luck the men left might make their safe passage back to the German lines, not more than fifty miles away.

Anyway, Captain Halle ordered those two aft gondolas knocked loose. Knocked loose is right! It wasn't much of a job with hacksaw and cable cutters. All airmen are born wreckers, and they know how to take things apart. Fact is, they pride themselves in the rapidity with which they can turn a ship into wreckage.

Taking half a dozen spare ropes, they anchored to the two gondolas that were going to remain there on the high pasture. Up through the inner rigging of the *LZ-99* they passed the slack of the ropes, throwing a few turns around stanchions and frame members. Fifteen minutes after the ship struck that mountain Captain Halle had her ready to go aloft again.

"Where do you want us this time?" the Old Man asked.

"Inside, Excellency. Aft on the catwalk," Halle said. "We must get the tail down and trim ship with passenger load, now that the craft is dropping her two aft power units."

Old Hoffmann, being such a darned good soldier, led his five wilted aides in, up and back. Lieutenant Beers went with them.

The chief rigger stepped up stiffly and saluted Halle.

"Sir," he reported, "two engine men, two machine gunners, the bombing sergeant and myself volunteer to remain on the ground and pay out the lines. We, sir, will make our way east."

Captain Halle saluted six brave men, said a few words and ordered all others aboard. Then, just as the last man was climbing through the control car's open door—the machine guns atop the bag began their stuttering. And the machine gunners were yelling, pointing.

Along a trail, above and to the Nis side of the *LZ-99*, came a scrambling, firing body of Chasseurs. There was no way to estimate their number, for the rearmost of them were still hidden in the scrub growth and among the rocks. But it was no time to count noses. Here was more trouble. Trouble just as real as that into which the Germans had already fallen.

Halle was just preparing to swing aboard his control car when Lieutenant Beers came sliding down a rope, via the bomb dropping shutters. Beers saluted and said—

"It will look better, sir, if I join this ground crew."

Captain Halle's first impulse was to order Beers back to his post. Then, on quick second thought, the captain too realized that it would look better. He saluted another brave man and yelled:

"Pay out your lines, Herr Beers. Easy! Let them run!"

Then, with the *LZ-99* trimming to a level keel, and ballooning, Captain Halle ordered his two motors back to running. She was light. She was taking her altitude, right up through the air. And the machine guns on the top platform rattled steadily.

The oncoming Chasseurs were still dangerous. Even as Halle took the

wheel, upon yelling "Pay out your lines, Herr Beers!" a shot from high up on the ridge found its way to the control car. A dial at the captain's left lost its glass, shattered, and the slug ricochetted off a stanchion. Again the wireless man was at the telephone, relaying Captain Halle's orders. Halle ordered the rigger on the catwalk, aft, to ask General Hoffmann and one other man to come forward. This by way of further trimming ship, for there were extra crewmen and gunners back in the tail with the six of the High Command.

GENERAL HOFFMANN arrived just in time to follow Captain Halle's point, directed at the handling party that had volunteered to remain on the ground. Those men, with Beers prominently out front, were making a last stand with Lugers drawn. They were even doing better than that. They were trying to bring battle to the Chasseurs above them in an effort to draw the enemy's fire and attention from the *LZ-99*. But that handful of men were in a tight place, up against it. They weren't going to last very long against the larger, higher body of rifles.

With her two motors driving her downwind, the crippled craft was soon beyond danger from that particular mountain side. Quickly, upon clearing the drag and throwdown of the Juz Morava's Valley, she had gone up to six thousand feet. The mountains over which she then flew were back, to the east, from both river and railroads. It looked like safer air; and Halle took care to keep that kind of air under him.

There was one logical destination now: Sofia. The air-line distance would be eighty-five miles. In short order, going in that easterly direction, they would be out of the mountains. Halle made the suggestion to General Hoffmann, asking permission.

The general merely answered—

"You are in command."

Captain Halle, taking care to keep well away from the rail line that goes from Nis down to Sofia, decided to circle wide to the north. The ship was well in hand, so he could give some attention to the study of his map. It was all new country to him; and eighty-five miles of another man's terrain is no joke. What's more, night was going to be along soon. It was already established off toward Sofia.

Also, off toward Sofia, and all through the eastern sky, there were faint flashes of lightning. Heat lightning, Halle hoped. But his hope wasn't strong; and time and the miles went by.

It was close to nine o'clock, and the last light of the long day had quit the western sky. Nearly half the distance to Sofia had been put behind them, and that lightning all through the east was now flashing with more strength, closer and with a greater frequency.

Captain Halle must have felt tragic again, for that slashing fire in the east might spell more trouble, and lots of it. He turned to his wireless man, ordering that the latter try for a contact with the legation wireless station at Sofia.

After five minutes of hard trying, the wireless operator reported no results. He judged that the electric disturbance off toward Sofia was too much for the station in that city. He said he'd try Constantinople. He tried, but there was nothing doing. The *LZ-99* was cut off from the world ahead.

At 9:20, however, the wireless had a bit of luck; and it was from a totally unexpected source. She picked up a conversation with a U-boat that was playing around in the Aegean Sea, about fifty miles off Salonika. The submarine reported that earlier wireless flashes from Sofia had reported violent, late afternoon electric storms. These storms were over the whole of the southeastern Balkans. And, said the U-boat, they were still going strong.

A U-boat and a Zeppelin are things quite far apart; and it isn't very easy to conjure a happy rendezvous between the two. But Captain Halle knew that the

two had gotten together on a few occasions. That was in the North Sea and Baltic. Maybe, thought Halle, they might work together again. At any rate, even with two hundred and thirty miles standing between them, it was good to know that there was some one with whom the *LZ-99* might make another wireless contact in case of trouble.

Captain Halle, talking it over with General Hoffmann, went right along toward the flashes in the east. Perhaps he could find a way through, around or under. He'd try.

A few more miles were flown. The play of electricity was a wonderful sight —for all those outside the *LZ-99*. But as for the *LZ-99*—well, it was getting too close. The stars were disappearing. There were no ground lights in that wild district. The lights of Sofia had not come into view. The compass, right then, was in good order. Five minutes more and that compass might be, as it was last night, lightning crazy. It was a good time to make a change; and Halle chose to make it.

He turned and said to General Hoffmann:

"We'll have to run away from that storm, Excellency. With our lack of power and ballast the ship would make a poor sea of it. It is just possible that we can work around it to the south."

Halle knew that the *LZ-99* couldn't face another session of storm. She'd had enough of that, and enough of just about everything. The sky to the south looked good. And in the south was Salonika. Just north of Salonika, in the valley of the Struma, was the German army. But between the *LZ-99* and that south country was another high range of rough country: the Rhodope Mountains. Halle's map showed that this range boasted one nine thousand, five hundred-foot peak. Also, there were more sky scratching humps east and west of that tall top. There was travel ahead.

Within half an hour Halle had boosted the *LZ-99's* altitude to eight thousand feet. The air was cooler, and that altitude came pretty much of its own accord. But also at the end of that first half hour of southward travel, the *LZ-99* had that nine thousand, five hundred foot mountain right out front. Halle gave way and got his ship west of it, into the deep and twisting Struma River Valley. There was a moon, though, and the job was not too hard. But on the other hand, there was no knowing when the ship would come over some hostile gun festered spot. This very thing happened just south of Gorna Dzumaja, about one hundred miles north of Salonika.

The ship was hit. Telephone calls came to Halle saying that gondolas and balloonettes were again holed. And another of General Hoffmann's aides, back on the catwalk, was wounded. The fuel supply was low and the situation was desperate. Captain Halle ordered one of the heavy fuel tanks cut away. The *LZ-99* ballooned to a greater altitude, her two motors roared at full gun. She sailed away from that hot spot. Seeing the end, with only a few hours' fuel supply left, the tragic captain began to plan an early landing. That is, if the German army could be located there on the plains north of the Struma's delta.

WITHIN the next ten minutes the ship was fired on three times, from as many different points among the hills. And those firing points were all to the east of the craft's course. Halle was being forced to the west; and that was a direction not to be desired. It was keeping him from the locality of possible safety. But that ground fire was heavy; too heavy to brave. Again the enemy was using mountain guns, and shrapnel was filling the air.

Altitude had to be won. Altitude—if there was any to be had. All the time, with the cooling of passing night, the thermometer was falling. Each degree of fall meant that the *LZ-99* would win some fifty feet of ceiling.

At ten o'clock, somewhere west of the Struma, the ship had an altimeter reading of nine thousand feet. But there were more towns and more railroads down there toward the deltas of the Struma and Vardar—and more troops. More guns. More hell to be faced, and the enemy had had hours of warning. Hours of warning that prepared them for another Zeppelin attack on Salonika. What's more, the Allied defenses of that key city had grown very keen and adequate. The best of anti-aircraft batteries were there, and the best of handlers. Also, at 10:15, the first searchlight stabbed the night, fanned once across the sky and hit the *LZ-99*. It held the ship, for the moment blinding her crew.

Bursting incendiary and shrapnel shells filled the air. The very sky shook with the explosions, so close were they. Rockets shot up and star flares floated slowly downward. The *LZ-99* was exposed to the glare of a sky lighter than day. At his side, Captain Halle heard old General Hoffmann yelling:

"Fly her now, Herr Halle! Fly her now!"

The attempt to lighten ship was desperate, epic. That dead staff officer was taken from his rest atop the baggage rack and dropped toward the enemy. Every one—from the general down—climbed out of his boots and clothing. Inside of a minute the *LZ-99* was crewed by an almost naked outfit of blood sweating men. The hand luggage of the staff went by the board. Another tank of fuel, leaving the ship with nothing now but the few gallons of reserve supply. Instruments went. All big tools were dropped. Halle ordered his wireless man to make one more contact with the U-boat, find their position now, then toss his set overside. That was done, and the wireless man handed the captain a slip of paper with the submarine's exact position thereon.

The *LZ-99* was losing hydrogen fast. She was sinking. No longer did her altimeter read nine thousand feet. And with all this hell a-popping, the tragic master of the *LZ-99* became aware of the fact that his craft was just across the bay from Salonika. He was flying over the marshes at the delta of the Vardar River. Cruisers, mine sweeps and transports in the gulf were playing their powerful lights across the sky. At the same time the guns from those Allied crafts were tossing up a wall of shot.

Through it all, flying directly south, the German made her way. More and more hydrogen was pouring from her containers, damages that the limited crew could not hope to repair. But that crew was fighting, and old General Hoffmann was telling Captain Halle to "fly her through, Herr Halle. Fly her through. I have had my view of Salonika."

The limping, falling bird finally won her way to the southern limits of that hot sector. There came a time when the lights could no longer hold her. And she had passed the place where shot and shell whistled through and around her. Now, except for an occasional shot from ships in the lower gulf, there was nothing much to fear. It was 10:35 and the *LZ-99* had been under that brutal fire for twenty minutes.

During the first breathing spell to follow her exit a call came on the control car's telephone. Some one aft on the catwalk said that the wounded staff officer, during the frantic lightening of ship, had done so to the extent of his own weight. He was gone, and nobody had been able to reach him and prevent the sacrifice. General Hoffmann said that the man was a good officer.

Captain Halle, upon coming into the clear, had signaled both power gondolas to reduce throttle. Now, of a sudden, he noticed that the starboard propeller was running at top speed. He telephoned that unit. There was no answer. The wireless operator ran up the ladder, through the ship, and down to that gondola. He telephoned back that the motorman was dead on the floor. It was a hard thing to do, but Captain Halle told the wireless man what to do

with that dead engineer. Then the *LZ-99* was lighter by one hundred and fifty pounds. There was nothing left to jettison. What the craft was carrying then she was doomed to carry till the end.

Captain Halle was facing south into a lightless sea. Not even a ship's riding lights showed on the black surface ahead and below. The surface, however, was not so far below. Four thousand feet was the elevation when 10:45 showed on the chronometer. Altitude and flying time were going.

The position given by the U-boat was close at hand then. It was useless for the *LZ-99* to carry on south. Nor could it hope for any safety to the west; while Turkey, to the east, was far beyond the reach of her nearly exhausted fuel supply Halle called for reduced throttle.

Five minutes later Captain Halle signaled for dead motors There wasn't enough fuel left to take the ship anywhere. She wasn't going anywhere, for that matter. Her time was just about up. There was no sign of the U-boat. And this was the position given in the last radio flash. With motors stopped, Halle ordered that the last few hundred pounds of fuel be dropped. Then all the water from the cooling systems of those last two motors, a matter of several hundredweight. All hands not actually of use on the damaged, leaking cells, were then ordered to the gondolas. Piece by piece, the movable parts were jettisoned.

Radiators went; all water, oil and fuel pipes were torn away. Carburetors, magnetos, boosters, coolers, wabble-pumps and generators. Sideplates and cam-housings. Even the propellers were pulled and dropped. And all the time, without suitable large tools, men worked in their frantic efforts to knock the entire gondolas loose from the ship. From inside the hull, all water containers were torn loose. Those hydrogen balloonettes that were now empty were taken from their fastenings. Whatever could be ripped out was ripped out. In this way the flying life of the drifting *LZ-99* was prolonged by minutes. Her altitude had fallen to one thousand, five hundred feet. The oversea air was hotter there. The little remaining buoyant gas took a slight expanding. So Halle's borrowed time was being stretched.

There was little or no wind. The night was quiet, dead. Just how much the craft was drifting was hard to ascertain. Perhaps not very much. Halle, however, had little hope for the *LZ-99's* future; so, no doubt, he no longer feared drifting far out on the landlocked Aegean. If he could manage to keep his command in the air till daybreak, there was just a chance that some humble Macedonian fisherman might happen along. Or perhaps it would be a Thesalian fisherman, for the tragic captain felt sure that he was pretty well south in the Aegean.

But it didn't much matter then. The *LZ-99* had made a good flight of it. And no wartime airman would, or could, ask more of the fates. Since this had to be, let it be. If the worst came to the worst, and the sea reached up and took them, there was still hope that they'd be picked up before the big bag lost all air support. Hope is always on the job where fighting men do their rough jobs of work.

ABOARD the pigboat *U-63* the top hour of twelve, midnight, was close at hand. She was lying at anchor about seventy miles south of Salonika. All ventilators, ports and hatches were open; and the crew was sleeping with the strange ability that comes from knowing how to grab rest on a picket fence. Topside, her double watch had stopped amidship to talk of this and that—

The double watch stopped talking and listened!

"Depth bomb!" one of them guessed, as something splashed the water.

That splash came heavy, and at a great distance. But the double watch waited in vain for the following dull thud and heave of sea.

A mile or so upwind the men of the *LZ-99* had managed to kick the port gondola loose.

The double watch still listened. Minutes passed, then a great clanking came to ear. It was high overhead. It sounded like a tram car rattling over loose joints. The moon had gone; and the sky, at first, showed nothing. But later, one of the watch caught a moving light in the sky.

They called the watch officer. The latter officer called his skipper. The skipper knew what this tool clanking thing was that drifted slowly on the wind. A general stand-to was sounded; and the *U-63* showed lights.

"Airship *LZ-99,* ahoy!" megaphoned the U-boat's captain.

Down through the night, from its eight or nine-hundred-foot elevation, the *LZ-99* answered—

"Navy ahoy!"

More lights were shown aboard the *U-63.* And her searchlights were dropped on the sea.

Captain Halle, with General Hoffmann cheering at his side, valved off. Down came the great cripple. Men yelled and made a great noise and quit taking that airship apart.

The *LZ-99* came to the surface within a hundred yards of the *U-63.* The sub worked alongside. General Hoffmann and the four remaining aides didn't like the idea of being rescued by the navy; but they quit that airship with a willingness that wasn't hard to understand. Fact is, four of that high body acted like men into whom the fear of God has been firmly fixed.

Captain Halle and a few men remained long enough to slit the last few hydrogen cells. Also, a few riggers made their way to the top of the bag and knifed the great envelop for yards and yards. She'd hold no air. It didn't take long to send her under the sea. And with that done, and aboard the U-boat, the tragic captain had time to recall that hunch he'd had, just a day or so ago, back at Königsberg.

The VISION *of* OLD DANIELS

By JOHN L. CONSIDINE

COMSTOCK rounders one night found old Daniels drunk in an alley and, procuring a wheelbarrow, they trundled him out to the graveyard. Beside the opened grave of a Chinaman whose bones were now in China they came upon a broken coffin and, laying Daniels along side it, hid themselves nearby.

It proved a long and tedious wait, but about dawn, when the mountain breezes were at their keenest, Daniels began to twitch, toss and tumble, to mutter, moan, groan and grumble. And finally he awoke with a jerk. Slowly he drew himself to a sitting position. Gravely, thoughtfully he gazed about him. Carefully he scrutinized the empty coffin and surveyed the open grave and the mournful array of tombstones that rose, tier by tier, around him to the summit of Cemetery Hill.

"The day of resurrection!" he solemnly exclaimed.

Mechanically he drew from his hip pocket a plug of navy, bit off a huge chew and set his jaws to work as he took a fresh survey of the desolate scene. He squirted a brown stream at the coffin—*his* coffin.

"Yep, the day of resurrection," he repeated in awed accents. "And I'm the first son of a gun out of the grave."

Beginning a Novel of the Gold Rush Days in the Yukon

CHAPTER I

THE ANTE

FOG veiled the timbers of Yesler's wharf that July morning in a ghostly sparkle; it quivered to the roar of trucks and freshly shod hoofs and to the skirling, invisible flight of gulls around a phantom ship. Silky, deluding, pervasive glamour of the sea smoked over the corded packs and clung with a beading halo to the mackinaws of the crowd.

The specter alongside was the ghost of a ship once dead. On the hood of one of her wheels, as it wavered above the stringpiece, the faded letters *George E. Starr,* Seattle, trickled through an ancient glaze of rust and soot. They identified all that was mortal of a condemned sidewheel ferryboat, which had been dragged from the boneyard to make a first, and in a way a posthumous, voyage beyond the Sound.

But to the men on the wharf this derelict was an argosy. Her musty reek of creosote, bilge and old ropes was the aroma of romance. The brawl of the trucks that loaded her was a song of gold.

And there was, in fact, a weaving lilt of music in the roar. It came from a quieter eddy in the fog where a man was playing an accordion, as he leaned against an upturned bale of hay near the ship's side. Ignored by the crowd and ignoring them, he poured into the din a lazy medley that dissolved there as vaguely as the mist, so skilfully pitched that its source was hardly noticeable.

His frayed corduroy clothes, the barked leather of his riding boots, his lean, rangy figure and sun browned skin, did not distinguish him in that weathered company. Clearer light might have defined a certain wary challenge in his good humored gray eyes, or have drawn attention to an odd scar that cut the corner of his mouth, accentuating his look of high temper and daring. Another, more recent mark, like the sear of a branding iron across the brown of his right hand, was occasionally exposed as his fingers ran over the accordion keys.

Gun scars were not a special matter for comment in this crowd. Unlike the varied mob that followed them later, the men who blazed the Yukon trails in the early Fall of '97 were almost all hard

SMOKY PASS

By

AUBREY BOYD

living men of the open: miners, cattlemen, railroaders and lumberjacks from the Northwest and Southwest; men who knew little of the sea, but every hazard of mountain and desert. If they noticed the accordion player at all, he was just a lone passenger of their own kind, killing time while waiting to go aboard.

Not far from him, however, stood a younger man, solitary like himself, whose serious eyes traced the fog maze curiously and seemed to find less novelty in the ship than in his fellow voyagers. Some dunnage bags, tied sailor fashion, lay on the wharf at the feet of the young observer. A faded reefer jacket fitted his broad shoulders with the snug effect that sailors call "sea-going", and the same stamp of the sea showed in his salt stiffened boots, his firm poise and that unconscious gallantry of bearing which lends grace to old clothes.

As the fog did not hide the two men from each other's view it had the effect of bringing them nearer, while sharpening the contrast between them. They were strongly built in different ways—as oak and steel are different. The younger man looked sturdier; the man with the accordion concealed under his idle posture the quick resilience of tempered metal.

Both of them were sun tanned—if the ruddy brown of sea sun can be compared to the dry bronze of the desert and the range. The boy's hair was dark and curly; the other's of a sun rusted color, and cut close, like a trooper's. Both had steady eyes; but where the boy's blue eyes reflected a sober discipline and the positive clarity of youth, the other's held a shade of half mocking tolerance, as if he took the world as he found it—and had found it mixed.

Some sense of this, perhaps, drew the musician's eyes for a curious instant on his listener. Looking away again into the veiled shimmer beyond the wharf, he began playing the tune of an old sea ballad.

"In eighteen hundred and seventy-six
I found myself in a hell of a fix—"

At the quick light of recognition in the boy's face, he masked a gleam of amused interest.

"Is that a Boston song?" he asked.

The boy smiled.

"My people used to sail ships out of Boston. I've heard the song since I was

a little nipper back home."

"Figured it was a line shot you come from that coast," said the accordion player. "But my remark was over the line, Bud," he hastened to add. "I wasn't aimin' to give offense."

The boy looked a little mystified as to the offense. He had arrived in the West too recently to understand its code of reserve about places of origin.

"I'd take you to be from the Northwest," he ventured, uncertainly.

"Your eye's good, Bud," replied the musician with a twinkle, as he improvised a series of chords. "But I been up and down a few. Ever hear this one—?" and he began, after a deep intake of the accordion, the chesty ballad of "Jack Donahue the Highwayman". "Heard it in the Barataria saloon in New Orleans, where a string of your deep sea sharks was braced up agin the bar, throwin' loose some earnest harmony. One of them—a little runt they called Limey—sung this yer . . ."

The boy chuckled as the accordion intoned, with a tremolo gasp, the sentimental cadences of "Liverpool Landlady". Then it drifted into music unfamiliar to him: half barbaric and half devotional melodies of the Western ranges, such as "Bill Roy" and "Montana Kid".

IN THE MIDST of this repertory the din that teemed around them was pierced by a new sound—the piping cry of a newsboy who came down the wharf shouting the headlines of a special edition of the *Seattle Times*.

"Extry! Buck Solo makes his last stand! Posse surrounds bandit in mountain pass! Extry!"

The accordion player lifted his head but did not pause in his playing, though the newsy's cry echoed a story which had been as keenly argued in the West that month as the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight. An unidentified gunman on a buckskin horse had ridden into a Nevada mining camp at night, trailing a man he seemed to have mistaken for some enemy. The mistake had resulted in a blazing gun battle in the dark street, from which he escaped. Not long afterward the buckskin reappeared on the Deer's Lodge trail in Montana, where its rider had stopped a stage to search the passengers. Strange to say, no money had been taken, but an express messenger, trying to catch him off guard, had been shot.

Dodging a posse of marshals and heading west, he had earned the soubriquet of Solo in a camp on the Montana border, having halted there long enough to show a gifted group of solo players some unexpected phases of that game. When the posse rode in, an hour behind him, the gamblers he had entertained were sketchy in their descriptions. As he had changed horses the marshals had little to guide them, but they suspected him of being a wide ranging gambler and outlaw known in the Northwest as Buck Tracy. His trail, lost at Clark's Fork, had been picked up again crossing the Cœur D'Alenes through Idaho, and the interest excited by the long and desperate chase began to close a net around him. The boy bought a paper and read the news bulletin.

"They've got him cornered in the Okanogan country," he said to the man with the accordion. "He won't escape now."

"Kind of hope he don't?" asked the other, without looking up from his playing.

"I hope he gets the full penalty of the law," was the boy's uncompromising answer. "He deserves it."

The Westerner glanced at him quaintly.

"The full penalty of the law, Bud, would leave you kind of short of lawyers, if you rammed it home. Not that this maverick is worth a cuss. But neither is the outfit that's doggin' him, and neither was the express rider he downed. I ain't so dead set on seein' him hanged. Hope he dies shootin'."

"That's a wrong principle," the boy returned, "though it seems to be general in the West. There's no excuse for these outlaws. What they really need is a stout rope and a hanging judge."

"Mebbe so," said the other indifferently, and went on playing.

The fog had lightened a little, and a gangplank now lumbered down from the steamer's deck. As the boy was assembling his dunnage bags, he found himself under the scrutiny of an official looking person who had appeared abruptly out of the mist and stood framed in it a few yards away. The officer's eyes grew less sharp on meeting his, and turned in a more casual way on his companion, who had closed the accordion case and was leaning over to fasten it.

"You two together?"

The boy nodded. It seemed unnecessary to explain that he and the accordion player were only chance acquaintances. Some official for the shipping company, he thought, was making a check-up of passengers.

With another glance at the man with the accordion, the officer passed on.

The Westerner threw a roll of blankets over his arm, put his accordion under it and, lifting one of the boy's packs with his free hand, wedged through the crowd that was swarming up the gangway. They found the cabin and covered parts of the deck already claimed, but there was a sheltered space under a lifeboat aft of the main cabin, where the boy stowed his burden. Noticing that his companion still kept the blankets on his shoulder, he pushed his stuff aside to make more room. The other considered him soberly.

"You listen to me like a good gun, Bud, in spite of them stern ideas about the law," he said. "Ever hit a boggy crossin', I'll stand by ye. My name's Speed Malone." And he held out his hand.

"Mine's Ed Maitland," the boy answered, somewhat puzzled at Malone's earnestness.

Dropping his light pack in the cleared space, the man rolled a cigaret, and while crimping the edge of the paper took a roving look along the deck. Then he made a back rest of the blankets and stretched himself, relaxing as from a long physical strain while he smoked and watched the crowd. His eyes were half closed, yet somehow as observant as ever of each passenger's approach.

Many of the prospectors were burdened with heavy outfits for which there was no space in the hold. The contrast between these and the Westerner's meager pack prompted the boy to ask—"How did you manage to get all your outfit stowed below?"

"Ain't packin' no outfit," was the vague reply. "I'm always on the move, Bud. Just one move ahead. An outfit wouldn't do me much good."

That sounded odd enough. It was generally thought that Seattle would be the last port of supply on this voyage. But the man didn't seem to think the point worth explaining; his gaze reverted to the gangway till the noise of its withdrawal deflected the flight of the gulls that soared in and out of the murk above. And now the steamer's siren scattered them in a clamoring volley.

A DEEP shudder ran through the ancient ship as the gates rattled shut. Hawsers, thrown from the bitts, splashed into the gloomy chasm between ship and wharf, and the sidewheeler cast off in a ponderous churning of white water, dropping a veil between herself and the pier with a swiftness that owed less to her pickup than to the opaqueness of the fog. She hung for a space on her own headway; then a bell clanged, and the engines started throbbing, to a melancholy chime of fog bells and moaning sirens.

As if the uncertainties of the venture were not high enough, she was no sooner in the channel than the click of dice, chips and coins began to rattle a careless measure above the voices of the mist. Embarked for the realms of gold, the

miners were "shooting" their money with an easy mind.

The Westerner shifted his attention from the rotted stay lines of the lifeboat and sat up to roll a fresh cigaret. He was nursing the pungent flame of a sulphur match between his hands when a fog horn, groaning just off their port bow, caused him to turn his head and let the match smoke out. Nothing was visible beyond the foaming strip from the wheel.

"Sounds like we was close inshore," he said.

Maitland shook his head.

"It's a sailing schooner wheezing her old bellows. We'll signal her now and stand by."

Almost with the words the sidewheeler gave a single blast; another bell tingled and the engines reversed in laggard naswer.

"She'll pass us to starboard. Sailers have the right-of-way."

Through the fog, close ahead on their right, a lumber schooner loomed slowly, seemed to graze the steamer's bow, and vanished.

"Slick," said the Westerner respectfully. "Your folks learned you to read 'em that way?"

But catching a clouded look of regret in the boy's eyes, he dispensed with the answer by saying:

"I ain't tryin' to read your hand, Bud. On'y my bank's surely yourn to go behind your play—when I get one. Which maybe ain't such a long throw—the way the jack is changin' owners on this yere packet."

While the words had no definite reference, Maitland noticed that two men, a little to their right, had turned a tarpaulined bale into a card table. One of them looked his way, with an invitation to join the game. When he declined, the man called over to Speed—

"Play a game of cawrds, neighbor?"

Those oddly broadened vowels were as clear as a State boundary.

"What kind of cards?" asked Speed, with mild interest.

"We figure they's on'y one koind. If you kin play solo, the tune is whur you want to set it. If you on'y persooms you kin, we resoigns ourself to stud poker, not aimin' to deproive no amatoor gent of his shirt, and frankly concedin' that we're the champeen soloists and sweet singers of Utawh."

A faint reserve, which had shown in Speed's face at mention of the game, vanished in a smile.

"I on'y play that game by ear," he said.

"Didn't aim to scare ye none," was the condescending answer.

"Which you gets me wrong," amended Speed, in the present tense of polite discourse. "What I shrink from is exposin' your gifted Mormon duet to the cold air without its pants, coat and vest."

"Stim'lated a heap," rejoined the man from Utah, "we stoifles ever' scroople and stawrts the play. Stack 'em up, Bill. Gent allows he's a solo player."

On the point of rising, Speed said to Maitland in an undertone—

"Stake me ten dollars, Bud."

Ten dollars happened to be half the boy's cash, and the idea that the man called Speed had started North with neither outfit nor money was almost incredible. But the request was made so candidly that after a moment's hesitation he shook a gold piece from his limp purse.

With a curious pause before accepting it, the Westerner asked—

"You figure these shorthorns can outplay me?"

"I was only thinking," Maitland said, "that gambling is a loser's game."

His companion grinned.

"If you wasn't a natural born gambler, Bud, you wouldn't be on this ship. Watch us lose."

The sweet singers preluded their harmony with a considerate warning.

"Removin' gold mines from gamblers is our daily routine, stranger. We'll set a quarter point—unless you feel hankerin's for ruin in a bigger way."

"Quarter suits me," said Speed mod-

estly, and made a precarious club bid which they passed with becoming gravity. On the completion of the final trick, however, their attention became visibly more exact.

MAITLAND knew nothing of the game, but was fascinated by the movement of his companion's hands while dealing. The fingers that moved with such suppleness over the keys of an accordion seemed to lure music of another kind from the smooth cards, as he riffled and snapped them into place and shot them out with clean precision, dropping the last of the round and the three cards of the widow almost in one gesture.

He won the next bid with a heart solo. This time his opponents did not hide their conviction that the gamble was unsound. But before they had recovered from that certainty, he had made his point by a shrewd handling of low cards. The sweet singers took a firmer grip on their cigars and settled into the game.

Stakes began to climb. Frog bids vanished. The widow was exposed and the game plunged into the swift hazards of sacrifice, guarantee and misere—with side bets to liven the risk.

Onlookers edged in from other groups to watch the play—among them a burly, red faced man who stood obscurely at the rim of the circle with his eyes fixed intently on Speed's face and hands. It would have taken an official badge to make the purpose of this watcher legible; he was dressed as a prospector, and the Law, supposedly, was part of all that which the ship had left behind. The gambler remained calm and composed as a deacon, playing good hands and bad with equal devoutness—or rather making bad ones good, or the cards were running hard against him. His success must be due to unusual skill, Maitland reflected, and the thought was echoed in a remark from one of the players.

"Wouldn't surprise me a whole lot to hear you'd played this game afore."

Speed was busy arranging a new hand, and did not answer. When he raised his eyes it was in a preoccupied way in Maitland's direction, but they rested instead on some one else in the crowd. One of his eyelids flickered slightly, as if to evade a wreath of cigaret smoke. From the gold he had collected, he transferred two handfuls to his pockets. The remainder of the pile he pushed out to center.

"This stack says I don't take a trick," he observed. "I'm goin' misere."

Had Maitland been watching closely he would have noticed a slight shifting on the part of the red faced man among the spectators. He might have remembered that skill in this game was one of the few identifying traits of the bandit, Buck Solo—had it not been a matter of common belief that the bandit was a captive in the Okanogans. He might have noticed that in a lazy upward glance which seemed to take cognizance of nothing, the intentness of the scrutinizing figure had been caught and registered by the man under observation. But no one's attention is sharpened by watching a game he does not understand, and Maitland's interest had begun to stray. He elbowed his way out of the circle to ramble over the ship.

Most of the passengers having chosen a position amidships, he found that the crowd thinned as he went forward of the main cabin. At the forward rail a lookout stood alone, peering into the blanket of mist ahead. They were now in the outer waters of the Sound; the traffic had dwindled and the hooting of sirens was muffled in far distance.

"How does she lie?" he asked the lookout.

"Off Port Townsend," the man said, without turning.

The boy stood by the rail awhile, eyeing the dim froth of water below, and that gray essence of things unseen and unforeseen through which the steamer was cleaving her blinded course.

He was not conscious of a contradiction in his advice to the Westerner about

gambling, though it ran deeper than his mere presence on the *George E. Starr.* Men of his name and blood had raced for cargoes in the days of the clipper ships, and later plunged the winnings into deep bottomed carriers, to lose them finally in wilder games of chance with the sea.

While none of his people had considered themselves gamblers, the word had been used by after-prophets commenting on their ruin, and some of this talk had come to his ears as a boy. The sea had claimed their lives and their fleet in a long sequence of disaster. His father had gone down in a storm with one of their ships. This tragedy had caused his mother's death when he was born. The remnant of the original stakes left in play had been involved by a defect in the underwriting of the lost cargoes.

His earliest memory was of a small schooner which his grandfather had managed to salvage out of the general wreck. From the old man he had learned, along with a knowledge of ships and water, some standards of conduct more conservative than those of the old sea dog himself, who had felt his responsibilities as an only guardian. After his grandfather's death, he had found employment with a firm of underwriters' agents, reporting on wrecks and salvage. It had led him into the study of admiralty law —a vocation his sea-going fathers would not have admired.

The star by which he charted this course had the name of Muriel, and was a lovely star, though uncertain and clouded by the troublesome question of money. Her parents did not look with favor on the last of the gambling and ruined Maitlands; and he himself was too aware of the setting she needed, too wise and too proud to imagine her being happy in poverty.

A chance of overcoming the obstacle had seemed to offer when he was sent West to investigate a wreck off the Farrallones, near San Francisco—his first important commission. But he had found the owners in a position rather like that of his own people when they crashed. His sympathy and the rights of the case were with the stranded adventurers as against the bankers. He had wired a report as fair to both sides as he could make it.

The return wire had virtually accused him of being bought by the owners. In a gust of anger he had resigned, though the whole structure of his plans went foundering on that reef. He was unwilling to return home till he had regained his footing, but his career was not an easy wreck to salvage.

Jobless, and with his small capital dwindling, he had been roving the wharves of that misty Western port of adventure when the news of the gold strike on Bonanza Creek burst on the world like a rocket—promising him a means of recovering more than he had lost.

"If you wasn't a gambler, Bud . . . "

Something the Westerner had said recurred to him now. He had been careful in buying his outfit, weighing the value of every purchase against his resources. A letter from Muriel had made him more than aware of how much hung on the outcome. His having drawn a passage on this derelict sidewheeler was a queer chance, but he believed the old tub was a little stauncher than she looked. Whether it was a wild gamble depended rather, he thought, on himself.

Yet, as he tardily remembered, he had already wasted part of his meager cash reserve for no better purpose than to stake a stranger in a card game. He grimaced to think how that detail would be relished by wiseacres at home. Well, he would be that much more cautious in future. The prophets of calamity would be fooled for once, if he had to be a miser and avoid every human contact. If he could make a rich strike in the first Winter—if . . .

The pistol shot that cut the thread of his revery came from the region of ship where he had left his pack. As he turned back down the deck he was swept against the rail by a curious crowd surg-

ing toward the same spot. Hauling himself up by a deck beam till he was clear of the crowd, he obtained a sheer view of the ship's side, and saw, sharply outlined in the fog, the figure of a burly, red faced man who was peering over the rail with a smoking revolver in his hand.

Some one touched his elbow.

"Man shot your pardner," a voice said. "He's overboard."

CHAPTER II

MISDEAL

HE PICKED up the words on the wing and shredded them for sense. A handful of cards held by one of the watchers at the rail gave him the inkling of an answer that meant nothing. A gamblers' quarrel, quick fingers not quick enough; a shot . . . even then he could not imagine this man taking that plunge for such a cause.

Heads were craned back toward the blank space in the fog the ship was leaving, but as yet the crowd hung suspended and still, like water poised on the crest of a surge, before relapsing in a futile backwash along the deck to the point where the man had been swallowed in the mist.

Wounded? Probably not much of a swimmer, if he came from inland. The boats would be slow . . .

In the same muted fraction of time Maitland's eye traced a curl of foam at the rim of the churning wheel; scanned the milky tangle that fell from it; measured the gray-green trough it whipped into lather.

That streaming wheel of chance whose masked croupier was the sea had hardly made one turn; but from the instant his foot touched the rail he had been drawing one deep unconscious breath into his lungs.

His leap from the rail was so swift that the engines were not reversed for a minute after he dived. When he came to the surface, hardly knowing in that gray murk whether he was breathing fog or sea, the steamer was out of sight. Automatically, as he lunged through the swell in the direction of the fallen man, he noted the distance her headway had carried her; he heard a distant creaking from the tackle of the falls; then muffled shouts and a splash. His ear told him that the rotted lines of one of the boats had given way from a jammed block while they were lowering.

Unable to see through the blur of spray and fog, he paused to listen for a cry. Relaxing was an effort; the cold brine had teeth of fire. Soon he caught a splashing sound not far ahead, louder than the tinkle of spray on the wave crests, and he cut through a slope of water toward it with the full power of a strong overhand stroke. Swiftly as he went, the sound receded. He stopped again, wondering if he had been deluded by a riffle, for the sea, as it dipped beneath the fog, was full of deceptive echoes. Hearing the sound once more, he shouted.

There was no answer, and he kept on, losing count of the space he was putting between himself and the steamer, though he had already noted her direction and the fact that the shore of Point Townsend must lie several miles off in the course he was following. The gambler, if the sound he heard was his swimming, might either be trying to make his way ashore, or might have lost his bearings in the fog. It seemed more probable that he had drowned, but the ironical chance occurred to him that he was trying to rescue a very capable swimmer, who, even if he were wounded —which now seemed unlikely—was deliberately avoiding a return to the ship. Meanwhile a troublesome heaviness at his feet warned him that his boots were filling.

He halted to tread water in the icy swell and shouted. The cry rasped in his throat. This time he seemed to hear an answer, but in the same instant his body was caught in a vise-like grip and pierced by a searing stab, as if a hot

blade had been thrust through it. The muscles of his back twisted in a paralyzing knot that stopped his breath.

Though the cramp was unbreakable, he fought it with every reserve of will, as it dragged him down, impotent, into shadowed, swirling, freezing depths. His lungs heaved; drums roared in his ears; his heart seemed to wedge in his throat. Manacled and strangled, he spun round in giddy orbits, racked by incredible pain.

But that yielded at last to the salty bitterness of defeat, and then to a mocking train of memories which faded away into a state that was neither pleasant nor unpleasant—strangely free from concern, fear or regret. He slipped out through chill regions of space where age-old saturnine presences were whirling round themselves in steady denial of the lure of living—out into an immensity where there was nothing. Nothing but a rhythmic eternal beat, like the clockwork of the universe, to the accompaniment of which, voice after voice, as it passed with each click into this spatial revelation was gasping, "Well, I'll be doggoned, I'll be—"

Shadows dissolved around him into misty daylight. Something was supporting him, choked and numb, on the summit of a swaying world of water, and he heard a voice saying between breaths:

"Well, I'll be doggoned. So it's you—you ornery young son of a sea dog. Last dive most got me—winded—"

Even the sight of the gambler's dripping face failed to make this clear.

"Don't figure I could swim you ashore," the voice continued. "And I'm locoed if I call that boat."

Yet this was exactly what Maitland heard him do a few moments later. The call brought him out of a mental fog into an actual one that was just as ghostly. No sound came back but the swish and ripple of the swell on which they were riding. The ship, his numbed brain informed him, had abandoned them for lost. Outgoing boats were few in that thick weather . . . He stirred and tried to speak, but his voice was gone. The man had one chance and only one: he might be able to make shore alone, if he started now . . . Instead he was swimming toward the sound of a buoy.

A buoy, as Maitland well knew, is a frail hope for drowning men in fog; passing ships give it a wide berth. With this thought he felt the full irony of what had happened. His attempted rescue was worse than useless; he was dragging down the man he had tried to save. That final detail struck him as unfair.

He tried to wrench himself free. But though the gambler's hold wavered, he could not loosen it. When he struggled to speak, the arm gripped him tighter. Then everything was drenched in a billowing haze of memories and darkness.

How long that unconscious interval was, he never knew. Through a rift in it he seemed to hear a shout and a vague creak and thump of oarlocks. Had the ship's boat found them after all? For some reason or other, that might make things awkward for the man called Speed.

"I told you to go," he murmured hazily.

But the veil closed over him again.

WHEN he opened his eyes, the gambler was sitting at a table, with a steaming cup in one hand and a cigaret in the other, watching him. He found himself rolled in blankets in a dim enclosure. The floor rolled slightly. A mingled odor of fish, coffee, spirits and damp tobacco made him think of a harbor tavern.

But as his sight cleared, he realized that he was lying in a bunk that ran back to the ribs of a boat. His wet clothes were drying on pegs in the heat of a small stove. There were pans on the stove, railed in with wire to keep them from slipping, and it was now apparent that the smell of tobacco came from a hot stove lid on which the gam-

bler was drying out some damp crumbs. He noticed a rusty alarm clock above the bunk, and a horn handled knife stuck in a beam on the opposite wall. The table at which Speed was sitting swung against what appeared to be a bulkhead, dividing the cabin from the hold.

Before he could observe more, the gambler was handing him a cupful of hot wine with the cheerful suggestion—

"Hoist yourself round this."

The drink helped clear his head.

"Where's the steamer?" he asked.

"Hell and gone by now," said Speed, and watched an illusory hope fade in the boy's face. According to the shipping bargain of the hastily chartered *George E. Starr,* outfits were to be landed on the beach at Dyea and there claimed by their owners. The outfit of a man given up for drowned would not be recoverable, even if he could claim another passage.

Maitland stretched himself painfully.

"Whose boat is this?"

"Some frog fisherman from Seattle was headin' for the halibut banks when the fog stopped him. Pulled in close to the buoy to be clear of the shippin' track. Now he says he'll take us ashore when he gets a wind. Don't reckon he'll get one soon, but it won't hurt ye none to thaw a while."

"I should have thanked you for helping me out," the boy said, in amends for his low spirits.

"On'y you got more grounds for cursin' than thanks?" prompted the gambler, and smiled at his expression. "The trouble was, I figured you was the deputy, trailin' me down the gulf."

The more Maitland heard the worse it sounded. He did not feel inclined to pursue that line of inquiry, but one rather irrelevant question left him wondering, and he said—

"If you thought I was the—deputy, what was the idea of turning back to save him from drowning?"

"Dunno," answered the Westerner. "Unless it was the myst'ry of a deputy havin' that much guts got me curious. I heard some one chokin'— If you want to draw so fine a bead on things, Bud, how come you jumped in after me?"

The other was silent. He had already asked himself that question.

A dark wavering in a shaft of light that fell into the cabin from the cockpit caused him to look up. Through the aperture, two heavy sea boots came in view, followed by a pair of corduroy trousers, a blue, close fitting jersey with shrunken sleeves and a plump and swarthy face, bluish around the chin where the beard was shaven and topped by a black cap with a shining visor. The cap was set well back on its wearer's head; from under it spread his pomaded hair, black as the vizor, and ending in upturned fish hooks low on the man's brow. The face, with its beaded narrow eyes, was an odd compound of avarice, vanity and the polish of pool halls.

One large hand rested on the bunk post near Maitland's head, allowing him to study a tattooed design on the inner forearm—two purple hearts pierced by a red arrow and exuding three saffron drops of blood above the sentiment, "*Amitie Fidele*". To the pungencies of fish and toasted tobacco was added a reek of cheap perfume.

"How does she blow, boss?" asked Speed, as the man entered.

"Ze win' he draw ver' slow. I tek you ashore, feefteen dollar. Non?"

"No," was the gambler's dry comment. "With the price of wind goin' up this way, I reckon we'll stay where we set."

The fisherman spread his hands.

"*C'est la blaque, quoi?* I mek ze feesheen' zree day. *B'en,*" he added in a quieter tone. "I tek you back to Seattle, feefty dollar."

"Go on, you horsethief," Speed answered good humoredly. "You've got plenty chuck in this wagon to ride us to the fishbanks and back, and it wouldn't cost you five dollars. How'ver, we ain't goin' to Seattle, or fishin' neither."

Frenchy folded his arms, unfolded them, and burst into a geyser of language which, if his activity signified anything, was far from pious. When the torrent subsided, Speed grinned.

"Sounds like a powerful cuss. But the way the cards is runnin', it ain't what I'd call a strong play. Instead of which, yer's a little proposition in the line of straight gamblin', and you can play it either end."

He drew from his pocket five double eagles and dropped them on the table.

"There's a hundred dollars, belongin' to me and my pardner. Now what does I up and do but gamble this yer hundred—" he stacked the five gold pieces in a neat column— "that you're takin' us north to the camp, Skagway, Alaska."

"Seattle," the Frenchman murmured, eyes on the gold.

Speed gave him a long pained scrutiny.

"Seems like frog eatin' must aterfy the organs of hearin' some." In whatever garden of rhetoric the gambler had culled this unclassified daisy, he dwelt on the syllables. "I said Skagway."

The fisherman began another outburst in his native tongue.

With no sign of impatience, the gambler pulled out a short barreled, triggerless .45 Colt, broke it open, clicked it back and placed it on the table.

"I don't savvy your lingo, Frenchy," he said equably, "but this baby comprehends ever' knowed dialec' and speaks it fluent. I plays her to copper my bet."

The Frenchman's eyes blazed. He lunged for the knife in the cabin wall. Before his fingers touched the haft, the gun roared and the knife clattered to the floor. In a curling haze of smoke the fisherman backed to the companion, while Speed carefully examined the bore of his revolver against the light and blew in.

"Mebbe you can translate that," he suggested. "Reckon the salt water ain't spoiled her accent none."

Maitland had started up at sight of the gun; now he threw the blankets aside.

"Put the gun down," he said sharply. "It's his boat and his right to say where he lands us. He picked us up in charity."

"You back out, Bud," said the gambler patiently. "He picked us up to count our change. This is a breed of buzzard you don't know about."

"I know piracy when I see it," retorted Maitland, "and that's a damned low brand of it."

IN THE stillness that followed these words, the ticking of Frenchy's alarm clock sounded like the clip-clop of hoofs on a hard road. Something flared and waned in the gambler's eyes as they met the other's unwavering gaze. The fisherman looked craftily at the face of each, as if to discover with which he would have to deal. Speed was the first to move. With a slow compression of his mouth, he returned the revolver to his belt and, looking down, shifted the coins between his fingers.

Now Maitland felt a peculiar regret, though the objection had been called for. He saw that the gambler had made this lawless move partly on his behalf, and he knew that he owed his escape from drowning to the value the man had set on his futile attempt at a rescue. But seizing a boat was a blacker offense to him than stealing a horse would have been to the Westerner, and the cool negligence with which it had been done was a bad sign. So instead of trying to mend his words, he said nothing.

The gambler was fumbling in his pocket, and Maitland emptied his own purse on the table, thinking some smaller gold was needed to pay for the landing. Speed, however, brought to light five more twenties and set them alongside the other stack with a reflective look at the fisherman.

Frenchy's eyes bulged in startled fascination, but he shook his head.

Speed extracted from his pockets some soggy greenbacks and mixed silver, which he spilled on the table in a heap.

"Four hundred dollars," he said crisply.

The fisherman rocked on his feet and sat down. This time, in refusing, there was an acquisitive and cunning glitter in his eye.

"*Pas assez,*" he replied.

"It assays plenty," said Speed. From the pile of money he picked out three fives and set them a little aside from it. "There's fifteen. Land us, and we'll buy a boat. Or we'll take some fisherman with us to the golden river."

He hummed a song which that phrase recalled to him, and became engrossed in the delicate task of rolling a smoke with damp paper. Taking a match from a watertight case, made by inserting a 12 gage brass shotgun shell into a No. 10, he carefully closed the container again, while a furrow deepened in the Frenchman's brow.

"Gold een zat reevare?"

"Gold, sure. Does the stiff live, Frenchy, pannin' an ounce of sense to the ton, who'd pass it up? Here's you, toilin' and moilin' year after year to get the jack to buy enough gear to catch enough fish to earn your chuck. So you can live long enough to pile up on a reef."

Frenchy nodded sadly.

"But the hand of fancy turns another card. Figure an independent frog of about your markin's, drivin' up the main street of his home town with a rose in his coat, a plug hat on his ear and a bartender's wave in his hair. 'Sight that extinguished lookin' buzzard,' mumble the cockeyed bystanders, 'in the diamond buckboard, follered by the mayor, the town band and a truck of champagne. Why, it's Frenchy, just home from the Yukon. Jammed a shovel in the dirt, by gar, and bent it on the mother lode!' "

There was an undertone of irony in this which the fisherman missed—a mocking parody on the hopes that were luring wiser men to the goldfields. Maitland caught it, and thought the skepticism came strangely from a man who had started empty handed for the same destination.

But Speed, who had been watching Frenchy with a speculative eye, gave all the money before him a sudden, brusk shove to the center of the table.

"It's yourn!" he said.

With an impulsive grab the fisherman clawed it toward him.

The gambler lighted his cigaret and spoke to Maitland through a lazy vapor of smoke.

"Unwind the verdic', judge. Is it legal?"

Maitland had been considering the proposition as it took shape. The chart in the cabin was sketchy, but he had sailed broken coasts before with less to go by. He liked the feel of the boat. Anything seemed better than turning back. The fisherman had been well paid—so well, in fact, that this was the main point he stumbled over.

"I can't pay my share," he began.

"Sink me, Bud," protested the Westerner, "if you ain't as unexpected as a parson's mule. The money was won on your stake, and half of it's yourn. Also, you're the deep sea shark. Boats is a branch of knowledge I'm free of, and I don't figure Frenchy for no oceanic scout. So we'll owe you for gettin' us there. When you drop me at Skagway, you'll be close to Dyea, up the gulf."

The boy pulled on his clothes and went out to look at the *Susette.* She proved to be a strong, deep keeled boat with the remains of a cutter's rigging, and a look of having known better things before Frenchy turned her into a smack.

For canvas the Frenchman used only a mainsail, following the simple practise of tidewater fishermen, but in the hold Maitland found pieces of a foresail and jib being used for fish carriers. From these he fashioned a balloon jib. When attached, it noticeably improved their headway on the light breeze that was lifting the fog.

"*Tiens!*" murmured the fisherman.

Speed grinned.

"Well, my brave buccaroos, grab the hall yards, or whatever you boat busters call them traces, and let her ride. I'm goin' below to deal up some chow."

And he lowered himself, singing, into the cabin, from which there soon ascended an appetizing savor of bacon, fried onions and coffee.

CHAPTER III

THE SONG OF JOE

ABOVE Queen Charlotte's Sound, the tides swirled fretfully under a wet gale from the Southwest, lacing through a labyrinth of island straits, and sometimes boiling over submerged reefs called manacles, to which the *Susette's* draft gave a dangerous reach.

The fisherman stood by muttering darkly at a kind of navigation beyond his skill. The first glow of his avarice was cooling. He felt himself at the mercy of two strong handed men; and, even if his boat escaped the reefs, he began to see a danger of losing her and four hundred dollars in other ways. To explain his having found them clinging to a buoy in the Sound, Speed had told him some fanciful story, which had not served to compose his misgivings.

Maitland was in a puzzle of his own about the gambler. Neither of them had referred again to their sudden escape from the steamer, and that vagueness left a certain reserve on both sides. But the bond between them as castaways was no ordinary one, and it had welded into an odd link of mutual liking and respect. Speed's unfailing cheerfulness was a grateful relief from the fisherman's grumblings. He was a provident cook and, in spite of his strangeness to the sea, had a natural quickness of hand and eye, an instinct for ropes and a steady nerve that made him much more helpful in rough water than Frenchy was.

Having had to overstay several watches, Maitland was glad when he found the open sea again at Dixon's Entrance, and was able to shove the tiller into Frenchy's unwilling hands and go below.

He ate a mulligan Speed had compiled from a "tailin's" of the previous meal, and tumbled into the bunk for a sleep. Awakened hours later by a thud of running seas, he had just caught a drowsy glimpse of his partner playing solitaire with Frenchy's cards under the swinging cabin lamp, when a sudden lurch sent chair and player sprawling.

"Pitchin' cayuses!" the gambler mumbled ruefully. "Am I goin' to ride this critter before we hit Skagway?"

Mention of Skagway reminded Maitland of a question he had wondered about.

"Why do you choose that camp instead of Dyea?" he asked.

The other rearranged his cards with some care.

"They's no call for a covered play between you and me, Bud. It don't suit my hand to meet the *George E. Starr* or her passengers till they have time to forget where they seen me last. There's no wires to beat in the North, and gettin' passed up for drowned is a good alibi."

That Speed had had a serious tangle with the law before boarding the ship, Maitland already suspected. He now saw that the security of the strange alibi lay in his own hands. Little as the fact appealed to him, he appreciated the other's confidence that he would not betray it.

"I was wondering," he said, "whether the White Pass from Skagway is a better trail."

"It's a horse trail. Where there's horses the pay is better. My special reason for choosin' it—" the Westerner's face hardened a little— "is that a man I'm lookin' for is liable to choose that route . . . What's your plan in makin' for Dyea?"

"I thought I might get a longshore job of some kind till I earned an outfit."

"You can do better. If you tied in with a horse outfit on the White Pass, they might pay for help and throw in the grub."

"But tools," Maitland objected.

The gambler's mouth twisted humorously, as he studied a card.

"If you mean picks and shovels, Bud, the hist'ry of prospectin' learns us they's mighty little satisfaction in a shovel, and none at all in a pick. You pick 'em up anywhere off the landscape."

"You don't mean that mining by hand doesn't pay?"

"Wouldn't say it like that. In the average run of minin', though, the percentage is heavy against the prospector, and I don't throw it out from hearsay. Take a pardner I had once, named Joe. No better gambler than Joe ever turned a card or drawed a gun. He had a private reason for wantin' to stake a gold mine—a reason I didn't know at first—but anyway we done it. We pursood the precious metals with all the knowed utensiles from Silver City west and north, without findin' grounds for Joe's delusion that prospectin' was a sounder form of gamblin' than poker. The on'y territory we passed blank was Nevada, where Joe felt kind of delicate about diggin'. He wasn't cured yet, though, and finely it checked him out."

"What did?"

"Prospectin', you might say." Speed placed the card he had paused over. "Honest prospectin' and a woman's love. On sight you wouldn't look for Joe to be downed by that snag neither. He'd lived rough and was trail-wise. Which he was surely tough as pine knots and no smoother—exceptin' for his hands. But you'd of liked him, Bud. Most any man would. Some way, while you don't look like him, and he didn't hold with your ideas about the law, you sort of remind me of him . . . Anyhow, he had a kind of deep and quiet way, with outbusts of sunshine between times when he liked to sing. First time I overhear Joe, he's bellerin' a song in a voice as big as a bar'l:

"Young man take this warnin' and stay if you can,
Far away from the Black Hills with your shovel and pan,
For old Settin' Bull and old Wallop-e-an
Is a-prizin' up hell round the town of Cheyenne—'

"Funny to think of Joe flaggin' all them warnin's of hisself and then shootin' right by them like he'd never heard that ballad. Some time after we'd exposed the fallacy of prospectin' as a way of livin', the rainbow drawed him back to scenes that was chancy for him. Seems like he met a singin' woman, and the song of his own finish would stop a train."

"Is there a song?"

"No, it's on'y my lowdown way of speakin'. Couldn't sing about Joe if a pipe organ was to call the tune. I dunno whether you have an ear for warnin's either. But in the hopes that good may come, as the parsons say, I'll break a rule and tell you the story straight from the guts. From the beginnin', which he told me once while drunk, and what I've figgered since . . .

"MAYBE a dozen years before I met him, Joe was ridin' alone one night through a desert in Nevada, for no visible reason, when he come on two men camped by a railroad. The place was a hundred miles from nowhere, and these two men was bushwacked behind a stack of ties, without a fire. Joe might of passed without seein' them except for his notice bein' drawed by a bullet zippin' through his hat. He tumbled off his horse and lay quiet in the mesquite. When the two men come up to examine his corpse, he covered 'em. The younger of them was tall, slim and dark, and had a cold eye like Billy the Kid's—one of these killers that shoot lead like a snake squirts poison. His pardner called him Reno, or some such a name.

"This *hombre,* with his hands in the air, looks Joe over. 'You seem middlin' handy with a gun,' he says. 'Middlin',' says Joe, 'when I got an objec'. But I

don't shoot passin' travelers through the head just for the fun of seein' them fall.' 'That was a misplay,' this Reno conceded. 'We figured you was a prowlin' sheriff's man, but maybe you ain't.'

"Joe had a grin to hisself at the idea of his bein' plugged at for a marshal. 'Well,' he said, 'puttin' one thing with another—that stack of ties, your dark camp and the blank rails—I can see grounds for your feelin' nervous. You can let your hands down, but lower 'em slow, because I suffer some that way myself.'

"Reno nodded, havin' sized as much. 'When I say you maybe ain't so inconvenient,' he explained, 'I mean we're layin' for the Overland and we're shorthanded. We could cut you in.'

" 'What's on her?' Joe asked.

" 'A gold payroll and ingots from the Mason smelter.'

"Joe was young, broke, and felt no call to be particular. He'd never looted a train, but he didn't know why not. So he said, 'All right, count me in.'

"The headlight showed a long ways over the desert, givin' them plenty of time. They laid ties acrost the track; piled some sage brush between the rails and set it afire. The train ground sparks and jerked to a stop just short of the ties. Joe and the second man handled the train crew, while Reno swapped fire with the coaches. Two passengers was hit and took back aboard. Joe got the stuff and handed it to Reno's pardner; then called the driver to open her up.

"The train smoked off in the dark. The train robbers jumped their mounts with the padlocked boxes, and Joe had just swung into the saddle when he heard some stones jostle behind him, and lookin' back, seen a small figger standin' between the empty rails.

"It was a little girl, no bigger than a minute and not more than three years old or so. Seemed she slipped her tether in the mixup, and had climbed down the steps and off the train just before it pulled out. She wasn't cryin'; just standin' there and lookin' at him with wonderin' baby eyes.

"Joe give a shout, and the other two reined back. When Reno seen what they'd drawed along with the gold, he swore.

" 'What you goin' to do about it?' says Joe.

" 'Do!' snaps Reno. 'Nothin' but leave her there. The posse that tracks us will find her. We've got two killin's to answer for to the marshals, without bein' lynched for kidnapin'.'

"It was cold sense one way, but too cold for Joe. It didn't go down with him to think of leavin' that little mite to toddle by herself among the sidewinders and coyotes. And at this junction the kid paddles over to where Joe's standin' and takes his hand—a natural which plumb beats him. He lifts her with him to the saddle and streaks after the other two, who're ridin' hard. She never give a whimper; seemed to like the gait.

"He overtook 'em under a butte where they'd stopped to breathe their horses and open the boxes. Reno was shoutin' mad when he seen the kid, but countin' the haul improved his temper some.

" 'Well, the layout is this yer, boys,' he says. 'We've got to scatter; the question is how we cut. Now that you've made this fool play, some one's got to take the kid. The man who does will leave a clearer trail and likely draw the posse. To even the chances, he'd ought to get his share in coin instead of ingots. We'll cut for it; low man takes the kid and this bag of gold.'

"Joe had a hunch that if Reno won the cut, he'd drop the kid by a railroad or take even less trouble. So, in the draw, he undercut the other two with a deuce. They made the split and scattered.

"On his own trail, Joe lined south, with the bag of gold lashed to the saddle and the baby sleepin' on his arm. By noon when his horse had a parchin' thirst, he give it its head and let it hunt water.

"Along about sundown, he come in sight of a homestead ranch, set low among some trees that stood out bright green against the sage. A sign of springs

or some underground flow. He watched it from a hill above, till dark. The little tyke babbled in baby lingo about her daddy who was on the train, and Joe told her he was takin' her to where she'd find him. She believed what he said; took to him that way. While she was sleepin' he saw a woman come out to draw water, and then the rancher waterin' his stock.

"At dark he sketched down to the springs with the kid and his horse. He told her he was goin' to leave her on the porch of the house, and ride away. She was to sit quiet till she couldn't hear him any more, and then she was to knock on the door. This woman at the ranch would take care of her till her daddy came. Near cryin' now, the little thing put up her arms to kiss him goodby. Joe set her on the porch, and alongside her he put the gold he'd took in the holdup. She sat still, just like he'd told her to, when he wheeled his horse and lit out into the desert.

"I've said Joe was tough, and there's hard men who've said the same; but his face was wet when he told me about that.

"A few days more and he's in a camp over the Nevada line, readin' some bad news. One of the passengers killed in the shootin' was the little girl's father, and what had made him mix in the play was his bein' a Federal marshal. She had no other relations that any one knowed of, but you can guess whether the hunt for her was long and keen.

"The second surprise was that she wasn't found. The rancher and his wife, where Joe'd left her, seemed to have a hanker for the kid and the money both—because they kept both. The sheriffs combed the ranches along the railroad. They had it figured right that she'd strayed off the train in the holdup, and that the road agents would have a whole lot less than nothin' to win by liftin' her. They caught and lost the track of one of the other horses, but it was headed west.

"Joe was troubled a heap about that little kid. Just as soon as he could double back to that ranch, he did, and studied the layout without showin'. He seen the kid wearin' a little pair of overalls and makin' mud pies. It seemed she was bein' treated right; she had a home, and he liked to know she was there. After that he didn't go back. It would be better for her to forget about him.

"But he didn't forget about her. Whenever he made a winnin' he'd save out some and salt it away. I seen him do that often before I knowed why. It was the next thing to havin' a daughter of his own. He kept track in his mind of how old she'd be gettin', though he always saw her as the little mite he'd swung on to his saddle that night when the train pulled out.

"WHICH is how," said Speed, shuffling the cards, "he got the prospectin' idea. He was playin' to win her a solid stake, like she might of had if her daddy hadn't been killed.

"And so, without my knowin' why, we dug meanin'less holes all over the Southwest and shot up the sufferin' bosoms of the hills in search of gold that didn't show. We was busted flat before Joe agreed to return to forms of gamblin' we knowed about. Then we played the cow towns and stacked up a pretty good pile.

"Instead of bein' peaked by the contrast, Joe got lower in his mind. He'd seemed more cheerful while he was ramblin' hungry through them rhyolite mountains. He took to grievin' about our absence of a purpose in life, and it sounded like his notion of a purpose would be to amble down a street with church bells ringin' and a drove of young 'uns in the cavvy. I knowed that was a combination he'd never fill to with the hole cards he held, but I figured some mem'ry was ridin' him, and when he begin to fumble his plays it was time to cash in on our luck before it turned. So we quit rich—rich for gamblers, I mean, though it wasn't the bonanza pile Joe'd

been lookin' for. It didn't cheer him none. Two bottles of the best remedy I know for memories on'y loosened his tongue, and he told me what I've told you.

"That was this Spring, a few months ago. Maybe a dozen to fifteen years after the train robbery. While talkin' of it, he showed me a funny shaped nugget, somethin' like a clover leaf, which he'd carried all that time—the on'y thing he'd kept out of the loot from the holdup. It had been in the box of ingots; the mill had saved it out from the ore they reduced, for a curio, and it had fell to Joe's share with the loose gold.

"He showed it to me as a sample of the kind of mineral deposits there was in Nevada. He'd got the fatal notion, now, that Nevada—the region he'd ought to keep clear of—was a territory where we could make a strike. Of course I tried hard to back him off that steer. Told him it was plumb against my judgment to cross the line or sink any more holes in the ground. But I could see he was wonderin' too about the kid, and that he'd go alone if I held out.

"So we migrate north till we find this ranch, up near the Walker Lake country, and draw a blank hand. It's boarded up, and empty. The stock's gone. Looks like the owner's left some time previous on a long trip. The ranch was off by itself a day's journey from any neighbor, and we hadn't no grounds for askin' questions.

"We rode on up to Virginia City, and there I had the bad luck to get drawed into a long three-day game, and Joe drifted down to Carson and a casino where they was some music he listened to under cover of shootin' dice for drinks.

"When I come back to the hotel I was sleepy and didn't take much count of Joe's not bein' in yet. Next day I found a note from him sayin' he'd be gone awhile and to wait for him. All I could learn in Virginia was that he'd been seen in Carson with a beautiful brunette singin' girl who was a stranger in both camps. Nobody knowed who she was. She'd single-footed in like the queen of the star faced Palamines and sung a few songs. As far as I could tell, she'd dropped her voice round him like a noose.

"I waited, of course. It was Joe's play, and I had no title to cut in. Wasn't long, though, when I heard somethin' that made me plenty sorry I hadn't trailed him. He'd been shot dead, from cover at night, in a street in Carson City.

"The officers of the law in Carson never guessed who Joe was, not to speak of bringin' his killer to the so-called bars of justice. He was just an unknowed rovin' gambler without no bounty on him they'd heard of, to make the case worth their trouble. They noticed his pockets was empty when he was found, and figured he'd been dropped by some alley thug and robbed. But he hadn't been in camp long enough for that kind of thief to size his roll, or the 'lucky' nugget, or the chances of killin' him and gettin' clear.

"The bystanders in Carson was free of ideas. This Yukon gold rumor was in the air and all they could talk of was gold. I on'y learned a few sketchy facts. Joe had had a passin' argument in a bar with some stranger. That had blowed over, and it was conceded that the man he'd brushed into was still in the bar when Joe was downed a ways up the street.

"Some one remembered that the girl had been talkin' to him in the saloon, and that she followed him out when he left it, but she wasn't suspected. He'd gone into the Nevada Hotel for a few minutes. A light haired, good lookin' feller had been stayin' there that she seemed to have an interest in; him and some others had trailed out around the time of the shootin'. She was the last to fade. All I'm certain of is that she knowed the man who done it, and it was through her it happened.

"I didn't track her, of course. The sign I traced was the clover leaf nugget—a rumor about a man who had it. I follered two blind leads, and one of them

into Montana. By now, the news of the gold strike in the North was burnin' the wires and blurrin' the trails. I stopped a stage to search the wrong man for the nugget. Made a misplay, and had to quit."

There was a pause in the gambler's quiet drawl. He had taken up the cards and was stacking them idly between his hands.

"They's one other sure thing," he said. "The Yukon will draw that man like a magnet and he'll be among the first run of the stampede. Up there, with the deck thinned out, I'll sort it through till I find him. When I do, he'll pay."

Though his tone had not changed, his eyes glinted for an instant with a cold fire.

"The law—" he added, but checked himself with the shadow of a smile. "Well, we figure that different, and it ain't the moral anyways which I'm aimin' to distill. The real lesson, Bud, is that while a pretty woman is a snare and a deadfall anywheres, in a minin' country she's a hot bolt in a ton of dynamite. Ever feel tempted to fool with that explosive, remember the warnin' a no-account gambler once done his best to give you. You played to tough luck when you cut my trail, but that's on'y temp'ry. Whereas, if you remember the moral, you won't have been so unlucky."

Maitland had followed the story with close interest, but the moral merely struck him as quaint. If there were a moral, he felt it in the unconscious principle of loyalty that had woven a thread of gold through the disreputable lives of the gambler and his dead partner. He was too engrossed in a dramatic feature of the story itself to notice how remarkably far Speed had trusted him in telling it.

"Did you ever consider," he asked, "that the singing girl might be the little girl that Joe found, grown up?"

Speed evidently had, but he did not have an opportunity to explain. His answer was interrupted by a sudden pitch and cant of the cabin floor. The *Susette* heeled over and half righted with a stumble and a shudder.

Without waiting to pull on his boots, Maitland jumped for the hatchway.

CHAPTER IV

NEW DECK

OUTSIDE Frenchy was sputtering curses into the phantom dawn as he struggled with the tiller. The *Susette* had been caught in a tide rip, smooth as burnished metal, against which the strong wind sent her staggering. A dim blue fretwork of rock and timber defined the channel she had entered as a tide race sluicing down the ebb from the Wrangell Rapids.

Maitland dropped the mainsail, caught the tiller and spun the boat round, letting her run with the tide. To leeward, just short of a creaming reef at the mouth of the strait, there was a backwater that beckoned through the darkness. He made for it, using the rudder like a sweep, till with the aid of the sidelong send of the current, they moored safely in a roping shoal at some distance from shore.

Here there was nothing to do but wait for the slack. The delay was costly in terms of food, but Speed took a light view of the setback. His proposal was that they should put in at Wrangell up the draw, for some beans and flour.

"Frenchy will stake us that far," he said. "Eh, Frenchy?"

The fisherman was in no such prodigal frame of mind.

"You got no more monee?" he demanded darkly.

"What of it?"

Frenchy's pent rage spilled over.

"You buy zat grub wiz zose gold you peeck off zat groun', comprends? You spik me lies, *hein? Boms! Crapauds!* Zat gol', where ees he?"

The gambler's reply was an amazing thing. He pointed a finger suddenly into the current and shouted:

"There it is! *Grab it!*"

Frenchy jumped overboard. He would

have been swept into the current had Maitland not caught the ankle of his boot and pulled him back.

While recovering his breath, the fisherman turned on Speed a look of hatred and rage that was glazed with a strange fear. He flung into the cabin, spilling sea water and oaths, while Maitland looked at the other in complete bewilderment.

Speed grimaced.

"Haven't you noticed that Frenchy is a 'jumpin' Frenchman'?" he inquired.

"What on earth's a jumping Frenchman?" Maitland echoed.

"It's a char'cter, not necessary French, but always hairtrigger, who jumps on request. They's a raft of 'em in the Northwest woods. Frenchy's on'y a jumpin' fisherman."

Except for what had just happened, his hearer would have thought he was joking.

"You remember," Speed explained, "how he grabbed the money we paid him for the boat, when I said 'take it?' That's one sign of his strain."

"You've seen that happen before?"

"Sure. I was playin' a camp on the Great Northern once, and we had a bottle of whisky on the card table—the on'y liquor in forty miles. Some one standin' over the play says to one of these impulsive *garçons,* 'Grab it!' The jumper grabbed the bottle and run. He outrun the field, and no one wanted to shoot for fear of hittin' the whisky. Then one of the pursuers yelled 'Drop it!' The bottle hit a rock and busted, but the call was good."

"A kind of suggestion?"

"Reckon that's the word for it. Suggest most anything to Frenchy in a hurry and he'll likely do it—except a friendly act."

The strait, however, solved their problem. Throwing out a line, they found the sluice alive with hungry fish, and were able at the ebb to set out again, with a fine catch of rock cod in tow.

Being north of the fifty-fifth latitude, they were now actually in Alaska, though the lower boundary of that long strip of coastal islands, called The Panhandle, had not yet been defined. The cliffs of the archipelago, scarred sea walls of glacial rock, formed gulfs and fiords that gashed deep into the rugged coast line, and the forests above them scented the moist wind from the Pacific with the fragrance of cedar, pine and spruce. Magnificent masts of evergreen dwindled skyward to an appearance of heather, under the clouds.

Maitland turned a course west of Zarembo Island into a long sea gorge, whose gloom shafted water yielded fish with an abundance that did not compensate for the slow sailing. Within three days their unvaried diet became more sinister than hunger, even to Frenchy. A storm crashed over them suddenly in spears of rain, whistling through the pine boughs high overhead, lashing and bending the serried ranks of spruce, drowning the fisherman's maledictions, and filling the gorge with the drafty roar of Titans, among whose feet the *Susette* tossed like an unnoticed shell.

To Maitland, everything they had known was strangely dimmed and remote—as if they had entered a region of no domain, and that notion of Speed's about having been drowned were real.

Morning brought a glamorous sky; the gulf, smooth as a mountain lake, gleamed with the misty jewels of a new born world. Maitland and Speed went swimming. A young deer swam out innocently into the sunlight as if to join them; then veered away, without alarm, in a long flashing ripple.

The breeze freshened and they came aboard in a glow to make sail again, while the fisherman slept or sulked in his bunk. The cliffs were melting into the brightness of a wider channel, and Speed was absently trolling a line from the deck when they heard the faint, far whine of a steamer's siren, passing southward by another course. It seemed to recall him to the world with which they had lost contact.

"How'd you come to choose this route, Bud?" he asked.

"It isn't a course the steamers would take," Maitland answered, after a pause. "I thought, if the *George E. Starr* were to pass us in the narrows, going back, some one might get the idea you weren't drowned."

The reflection of a wave to which they were riding illumined the other's face but left his eyes obscured.

"That's a long way to go for a stranger," he said.

Maitland shook his head. The word "stranger" hardly applies to a man with whom one has been drowned and brought alive again.

"I've been thinking," he said, rather hesitantly, "of how we started this trip together. It's a fresh start for both of us, in a way. Why couldn't we see it through as partners?"

The gambler twisted the line in his hands.

"It says a whole lot to me, Bud. I've always wanted to square you for that lost outfit, and I could steer you some in the gold camps. But as for pardners—you don't know who I am."

"Forget about the outfit. And the other trouble too. It's a new deal, isn't it?"

"Meanin'?"

"If you'll agree to respect the law while we're partners, your word's good with me."

The flaw in his proposition appeared to Maitland during the silence that followed. While Speed might have left his record behind him, he had come North with a purpose he wasn't likely to forget. The Westerner's reply, however, took an unexpected form.

"Suppose I coppered against a forced play by sayin' I'd pull out and leave you clear if I had to tangle with the law. Would that go?"

He looked up with a misty question in his eyes, and two brown hands locked on the bargain.

"Which I wouldn't bank so high on that play, on'y we'll reach Skagway ahead of the women. Barrin' such jinxes, keepin' out of needless trouble ought to be mighty near as simple as, say—eatin'. I can't think of nothin' right now that would be simpler."

TOWARD sunset of a day late in August, they neared the inner canyon of a vast marine corridor, whose snow crested mountain walls lifted to heights of a thousand feet and more, sheer out of the sea, casting a half mile shadow into the fiord. On ledges of these rock faces, spruce and jackpines perched like window shrubs.

Clouds of mist from the smoky fall of mountain streams and glaciers hung in webs between the canyon heads, and the sunlight, shafting through it, shed a random brightness on bays and beach coves along the shore. There were fawny stretches of beach rye where the cliffs receded from the shore line. Clusters of salmon berries and blueberries in the brush filled ravines mocked the gloom of giant boulders that lay bearded with seaweed, and deep shadowed in the ground swell.

As the *Susette* stood out to pass a mountain spur, a sudden clamoring echo that grew in volume set the ears of the voyagers tingling. They emerged on a vista of bright water in which a cargo steamer lay at anchor, some two hundred yards from shore. Hay scows and tending rafts answered the cackle of her winch, as if a flock of ravening birds had alighted there in full cry.

The ship, it appeared on nearer view, was lowering horses into the gulf, while some men on a lighter, moored alongside, released the slings to let them swim ashore. The landing beach shone golden in the sunlight, shelving steeply down from graveled flats where a river canyon opened its broad delta on the sea. A bald peak glittering above it marked it as the outlet of the Skagway River and the gate of the White Pass.

When the boom swung again two gaudy pintos flashed into the air and took water, the second horse obscuring the raft in a smother of spray. De-

lighted whooping from the steamer's deck gave a hint of what had happened. Some over-eager person on the raft—probably the owner of the broncos—had lost his balance while trying to unhook them, and had fallen in.

Maitland rubbed his eyes. Hunger and the sun bright swell blurred them with floating colored disks. One of the pintos was swimming shoreward; the other had taken fright and was heading blindly down the gulf.

"Might buy us a feed if we round up this cayuse," Speed suggested. "See if you can turn him, Bud."

Skilfully as Maitland matched its frightened zigzags, however, he failed to turn it. The bronco had a blind eye. He succeeded in running close, and Speed ringed its head with a noose. To avoid dragging its nose under water, the Westerner played out his line to the end, but the line proved too short and the *Susette* a little too heavy. Rather than let go, he jumped in.

"See ye ashore," he shouted back from the water.

Hauling along the rope to the bronco's head, he caught its tail with the other hand and used this as a rudder to steer it shoreward, while he swam alongside.

Watching their progress, Maitland did not notice the *Susette's* approach to the steamer, which was now close abeam. The name beneath her stern rail was the *Willamette*, San Francisco. Many of her passengers were still waiting to have their outfits landed.

Oddly the first to glimpse an opportunity in the *Susette* was the man who had fallen off the lighter. He was short, fat, and of Jewish features; and his sopping clothes had lost in the gulf whatever resemblance to a pioneer they might have lent him. But the water hadn't impaired his wits.

"Hey, wit' that boat!" he called out. "My outfit for how much do you want to land it? Five dollars?"

This mention of Frenchy's favorite coin brought the fisherman out of a coma; he gave eager signs of assent. Simultaneously on the lighter, there was a general reaching for purses and bank rolls.

As Maitland ran under the ship's shadow and moored to the raft a tinkling laugh from the rail above caused him to look up. His eyes met the dancing dark ones of a very beautiful young woman who was looking down at him with an expression half amused and half curious. He had an oddly confused sensation.

A bangle on her arm struck a crystal flash from the sun, as she raised her hand from the rail and blew him a kiss mischievously from rosy fingertips.

The gesture was noticed by a tall, heavily built man who stood on the rail directing the unloading of the horses—a man with the eagle poise of a leader and a masterful look of power under easy command. His handsome face had been burned by the sun to the color of saddle leather, and its swarthiness gave an insolent sharpness of blue to his eyes, while it dimmed the black brows that ran in a bar across his forehead. He frowned thoughtfully at the new arrival.

CHAPTER V

IN THE DRAW

BUT here the *Susette* sagged under the weight of one of the Jew's bales, and Maitland brought his eyes down to a safer level, where he helped stow the outfit aboard. The tarpaulined packs were marked with the name "Adolph Steiner" in gold paint, and their wet owner had clambered on the sun warmed deck of the cabin to dry himself. There were other bids for space on the sailboat, which Frenchy accepted as they came, till she carried a gunwale load.

The men on the lighter looked like veteran prospectors, and their skilfully corded packs told the same story. One of them—a meager, gray haired but wiry old-timer, shifted a huge tobacco quid in his cheek as he took one end of a pack

Maitland was swinging and said—

"Pretty piece of herdin' you boys done out thar."

The winch roared just then, and the old-timer nodded toward the inner shadows of the lighter where a yellow haired youth was leaning out to uncouple a horse from the slings.

"Pete, yer," he said, "figures your pardner could of rode the pinto in."

In the abrupt silence as the winch stopped, Pete heard what was said. When the horse was free, he threw back the gold hair that had fallen into his eyes and looked up casually at Maitland.

His features, lighted by a stray sunbeam, were remarkably attractive, with the clear, even tan that fair skinned people sometimes acquire. His mouth and chin were finely modeled but full of character, which was evident, too, in his candid, wide set eyes—eyes of bluish gray that captured warmer glints from the sun. Slenderly and gracefully built, there was a touch of dandyism about him, due perhaps to his trim, smooth fitting riding boots, and to the pearl and gold stock of a revolver that jutted from an ornamented holster worn close to his belt—the kind of weapon sometimes awarded for crack riding in the round-ups.

"It's been done, mister," said Pete.

"Shucks, boy," returned the old-timer tolerantly, "you can't tell me what's been done with a horse. I say it's too fer. I heard tell that this yer outlaw Buck Solo swum Clark's Fork that way, but it ain't been witnessed and he's dead. Ridin' a horse from yer to thar in rough water not yet becomin' history in the Northwest, it surely ain't in the nature of a Nevada horse—or rider. All the water in your home State is drunk for liquor."

The young Nevadan did not answer directly. He signaled to some one on the deck above, and a little later a black mare came down in the sling, her nose quivering at the brine below. She quieted under the boy's firm touch on her silky neck.

Then with a move so swift that it was accomplished almost before it was seen, mare and boy shot away into sunlit water.

A brandy faced man in a sheepskin coat whom Maitland had not noticed before crossed the raft in two unsteady strides.

"Come back here, Pete!" he called out.

The boy paid no heed. He was drenched to the belt but riding lightly, leaning forward and guiding the mare with a halter loop over her nose.

"Head him off with your boat," the man appealed to Maitland. "He'll drown hisself."

Maitland left Frenchy to take in the *Susette* and her cargo, and cast off in the smallboat with a shove of an oar against the raft. He followed in the mare's wake for awhile without attempting to overtake them. Troubled by the tide swell, the mare was meeting every rise at an angle that brought the water to her master's shoulders, black mane and gold hair mingling in the sunlight. The tension of the rider's voice seemed to lift her.

"The beach—on'y a little way now, sweetheart. Over this one, Chiquita, over it! Good girl, over it!"

The mare responded gamely and struggled on, sobbing for the breath she dared not draw. Sunk to the eyes in the shoreward wash of the swell, which barely left her rider's head above water, she labored up another foaming hill, flagging and spent.

With a few strong pulls Maitland topped the same crest. He meant to run alongside and lift the rider off, but this was forgetting the mare, who now saw the boat for the first time and plunged toward it, thrashing for a foothold. It caught the impact of one hoof on the prow and rocked crazily, as Maitland spun it within reach of the boy. But Pete was tugging at the halter rope to turn the mare's head.

"Keep that damned boat out of my way," he yelled, "or by—"

The words were rudely stifled by a

comber that smoked over his head, rolling him and his mount completely over. The mare came up riderless. Catching the halter, Maitland pulled her astern, afraid that her hoofs might strike the boy's head. Seeing a gleam of gold in the green water he reached for it—tangled his fingers in a mop of hair and pulled the head above water.

Pete gasped, and held the rail a moment to get his breath. Then he swung over as easily as if he were vaulting into a saddle, landing with a splash in the water that washed along the floorboards. Beside the sea they had shipped, a jet was spouting in through a broken seam where the mare's hoof had struck.

He raised himself to the thwart, shaking the wet hair from his eyes, which were blazing.

"You—" he began.

"Grab that baling dipper," said Maitland shortly.

He had pushed an oar into the stern groove and was holding the mare's halter with his free hand while he sculled shoreward. After a look at the rising water, Pete complied. It was slow work, but they beached in advance of other boats that were coming in from the ship. As the mare climbed the gravel and shook herself, her master jumped lightly ashore. He was draining the water from his boots when Maitland pulled up the dinghy.

The sudden landing on still ground made the sailor conscious of the effects of a week's starvation. He felt the beach reel, and had to steady himself against the boat. Then he tipped it on its side to examine the injured seam.

A pair of trimly shod feet presently appeared on the sand beside him and he looked up into gray eyes that sparked fire.

"Perhaps now," said Pete incisively, "you'll let me in on the idea of all this life savin'."

Maitland was nettled and angry. Both were too angry to notice that curious observers were approaching them from nearby tents. They had landed in a sand hollow out of view of the main camp.

"You're good," the boy continued. "First you foul a sound horse and throw me in the sea; then yank me into a sluice box and dump me on the beach to flop myself dry—while you inspect the boat. If you call that life savin', I wonder what you understand by murder!"

Too astonished to reply, Maitland held the dory dipper unconsciously suspended, half full of sand and water.

"Are you hopin' I'll faint, so you can douse me with that?" inquired Pete.

Through the enlarging group of spectators came two men who had just landed. One of them Maitland saw to be the man with the florid, purplish face and the sheepskin coat, who had asked him to follow the boy ashore. Evidently Pete's partner. The other was the big sunburned, hawk faced man he had seen standing at the ship's rail.

"Need any help, Pete?" the latter drawled as they drew up.

"Help?" Pete inquired, eyeing him coldly. "I needed some bad about an hour ago when I was drownin', but this boy give me plenty. Rather'n take any help from you, I'd sink."

At these strange words, Pete's brandy faced friend intervened with a futile, pacifying gesture. Maitland noticed now what had not been apparent before; Pete's partner was drunk, after the deceiving fashion of the morose and habitual drinker.

"Leave 'em alone, Fallon," he mumbled.

Fallon frowned at Maitland, seeming to think him accountable for Pete's anger.

"You better toughen your feet some, feller," he commented, "before you get so prominent round here."

THIS uncalled for insult, added to Pete's outburst, was one too many. The baling dipper would have gone hurtling at Fallon's head, had he not, with an instantaneous and powerful blow, sent it

sloshing over the boat. Maitland swung for his jaw, but stumbled. The next thing he knew was a crashing jar in the stomach and another in the back of his head, as he hit the sand.

He pulled out of a mist to lunge back at the man, but found Pete between them, with a gun jammed against his antagonist's middle.

"Back out of this, Fallon," the boy was saying. "It's my argument, and I didn't deal you in on it."

Though not visibly concerned about the gun, Fallon bestowed a sardonic grimace on Maitland, and yielded slowly to the tug of Pete's partner on his arm.

Pete stared at the crowd till they also left. Then he turned to Maitland and said in a voice of astonishing gentleness—

"You sick, pardner?"

"No," Maitland growled, and jerked the boat back on its side to resume his work.

"Don't be sore," Pete remonstrated. "I ain't such a bad Indian when I'm dry." He squeezed some more water out of his shirt. "That's one time I saved *your* life. Fallon would just as lief shoot you as say hello."

Inside the boat, Maitland continued calking the seam in silence.

"My name's Pete," the boy volunteered. "The man with the woolly coat's my pardner, Bill Owens. The girl that throwed you a kiss's name is Rose . . . But I reckon you don't care about women?" he inquired, undiscouraged by the silence that greeted these amenities.

"My partner," said Maitland at last, "thinks they're a hot bolt in dynamite."

"That's good advice," Pete concurred seriously. "It's deafenin' to think of what might happen if Rose took an interest in—any man."

"Because of Fallon?""

"Not on'y because of him." The boy's tone was obscure.

"You, then?"

"I don't care a hoot in hell about Rose." Pete looked inside the boat to note the effect of this. "I'm a man among men."

"You swear like one," his hearer admitted.

"Swear?" queried Pete in surprise "Wasn't for the snaffle hold I got on myself, I'd maybe have swore some."

Having finished his job, Maitland let the boat roll back on the sand.

"If you don't like me," the boy said, "why don't you cuss me out? Say what you're thinkin', man to man."

Maitland considered him while cleaning his hands on some shreds of rope.

"Well," he said, "man to man, you make a lot of noise for your size. It's a pity you squawk when you lose."

Pete winced.

"That's a hard cuss," he murmured. "What else?"

"That's all," said Maitland, surprised by a glimpse of sensitiveness under the boyish swagger.

Pete threw a skilful hitch over the mare's nose and mounted almost in the same movement. The mare was away in a twinkling, but he brought her round again in a dexterous circle, controlling her with unconscious ease, while his eyes, which were still a little damp from the sea, remained fixed on Maitland's.

"I on'y want to say, mister, if I don't lose easy, I don't quit easy, either, or forget. Maybe some day you'll learn it's so."

And with no visible urge from him, the mare sped down the beach like an arrow.

Maitland stared after them, held by the grace of the picture they made, and by wonder at the quick moods of this amazing boy. There was a vibrant spirit in the youngster that attracted him, and some other appealing, though annoying quality which he had never encountered before.

He was still watching them when he saw Speed coming over the beach toward him. The outlaw topped a rise of sand and paused to look back after the vanishing horseman.

"Man, howdy," he exclaimed, as he joined his partner, "can't that kid ride!"

He asked no questions about Maitland's landing, which the dip of the beach had concealed from him. But the gleam of pleasure in his face was overcast.

"Did Frenchy bring the cargo in?" Maitland asked.

"Yep." Speed grimaced. "He come ashore like the king of the Klondike. The Jew, Steiner, noticin' what he made on that haul, and findin' we hadn't any share in the boat, tied him up as a business pardner before they landed. Steiner's horses and Frenchy's boat. Ferry and haulin'."

"No!"

"It's so. Steiner had it figured we'd work for them. You on the boat, me on the trail. Bein' green about gold camps, he mentioned three dollars a day and grub; couldn't see ten. Then up walks a quiet spoken dude who says he's come to Skagway without horses, and wants to reach the Chilkoot up the draw, where maybe he can hire men to hand-haul his outfit. Offers Frenchy two case notes just to land him there. Before the fisherman gets untangled, Steiner says he's got horses, and will pack the outfit over the White Pass for six hundred. The gold lined dude says O. K, pays an advance and walks off to his tent. Then I could maybe raised the Jew to ten, except for Frenchy claimin' it was too much. Rememberin' what I'd refrained from doin' to that fisherman's hide gnawed on me considerable, and I checked out, refusin' Steiner's offer of a feed."

Maitland smiled.

"We'll get another job. The loss of Frenchy's company is worth a little starving."

"Sure." Speed nodded. "I ain't pawin' over the discard."

"Then what's troubling you?"

"Did you see that woman?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You saw her?"

"What of it?"

"What of it!" Speed echoed. "A woman that fades the Roarin' Bory Alice five ways for looks. Footloose. Four hundred men slickin' their hair and unslackin' their ropes while the boss of a hard faced Nevada outfit watches her and figures . . . And you ask me what of it? Well, Bud, if you don't know, I just won't copper your appetite by tellin' you."

CHAPTER VI

LADY LUCK

THE banquets of Lucullus are said to waft a pleasant aroma down the riverbank of time, but one exquisite delicacy which that gastronome never enjoyed was a can of preserved peaches after a two weeks' diet of fish boiled in sea water.

They had made their camp on the beach a little above the surf and in the lee of a rude landing wharf. All the prospectors had hauled their outfits up on the river flats, which were shut from view by the bare shelf of the beach, except for sparks from the crackling evening fires.

Maitland was nursing some driftwood into flame and Speed was gathering fuel when the tremendous find occurred. One small can had fallen from some broken pack on landing, and rolled under the wharf where Speed discovered it. The flaw in their enjoyment of it was that they ate a dessert with nothing to go before. It gave a cruel edge to their hunger, already sharpened by the poignant savor of broiling meat from camp-fires above.

The crisp air, too, tingled in their nostrils like a dry champagne. A clouded vestige of the glory of the closing day still lingered in the sky. Autumn was ending her brief reign in a twinkling bacchanal, distilling the tints of snow crystals into fine liquors and flaunting them skyward to stain the brush on the upper crags with transparent hues of russet and amber. Through the blue strays of smoke from the flats, which wavered across the spruce below, there were fugitive glints of silver from birch trunks and white poplars, and a dim

sprinkling of gold from their leaves.

A warm and moister current, however, was blowing in from the west, and the twilight clouded early. When Speed, with his uncanny ear for footfalls, touched his partner's arm and nodded up the beach, a second glance was needed to distinguish who it was.

Strangely altered in gait and demeanor, the fisherman came down to his boat. His casquette had a jaunty slant; his belt was cinched low, and his lips were distended in a tuneless whistle. On noticing his recent dorymates, he spat lightly and went on whistling.

"Sketch of a pay train passin' two tramps," said Speed.

Frenchy got into the rowboat and pushed off. He paused beyond the surf to convey some comments in his native tongue, which, for want of a translator, might have been ignored. But Frenchy had a craving to be understood.

"*Boms! Vauriens!* Kip off my bateau, you chip wharf pirate . . . "

Maitland was knee deep in the swell before Frenchy could seize his oars. Speed, without rising, shouted one word like a pistol crack.

"*Jump!*"

The fisherman leaped with a splash into the dark water, and made for the *Susette* as fast as he could swim—a symbol of stampede in its most abject form. There he jerked up the mooring weight and beat for a safer anchorage.

When Maitland backed out of the shore wash, Speed was rolling gleefully on the gravel.

"I was beginnin' to wonder," he chuckled, "just how much wind-up you could take without slippin'. The man don't live, I reckon, who could eat fish for a week without tinglin' some."

But his own allusion to fish was a sobering reminder of what they were likely to have for breakfast. With a glance at the clouds he said:

"It's goin' to rain, and we'll need blankets. While you're dryin' out, I better do a sketch round for one of these yer fellers with gold lined pockets."

"You won't—" Maitland started to say, and stopped.

"I won't stand no one up, if that's what you mean. Ain't been playin' the camps this long without learnin' how to rustle a peaceful handout. You watch your own footin', my young bucko."

For an hour or so after he had gone, Maitland sat pondering over the fire. Through the raveled clouds a moon ran murkily adrift, shedding smoky phantoms of light along the gulf, and into the blood-red lane of the steamer's lamp. The camp lay silent, yet its darkness was charged with a hovering sense of movement like a whirr of wings. Some disturbing magic compounded of the tang of wood smoke, earth and sea, and the resinous breath of spruce trees that swayed invisibly in the dusk.

A gust of wind touched the fire's heart to a glow and passed over the sleeping camp like a ghost. Unconsciously marking the rhythmic shore swell, he lapsed into a waking drowse that was curiously suspended; thoughts of home and of things past eluded him as completely as the sense of things to come.

FROM this abstraction he was roused by a slight crunching sound in the gravel, and glanced up almost absently at the shape of a horse, limned in fiery lines against the dark. An upward glow from the fire lighted a woman's face which he seemed to remember. Then a low, musical laugh gave body to the vision.

"Sleepy?" she said.

There was a nebulous sparkle in her own eyes, as if she had just wakened. In the dimming fireglow, the blurred warmth of her mouth against a lyrical soft pallor made him think in some strange way of red roses across the moon. Her hair was a dusky satin; the open collar of a jet-black shirt accented without seeming intention, in that changing darkness, the exquisite white curve of her throat.

She had stolen into the fire's dim circle like the dreaming spirit of night

itself. The horse had followed her, unled.

"You didn't know me."

A questioning note in her voice floated above its teasing undercurrent with a faint huskiness that tightened his throat —as in his boyhood some beautiful things had done: old gems, a yacht's smooth lines, pansies, the distant echo of a bugle, velvet . . .

He stood up, still half dreaming, as she pulled her horse under the shadow of the wharf. Her dark eyes masked with a vagrant humor some caprice he could not fathom. When she seated herself on a fallen wharf timber, leaving a space beside her in wordless invitation, he obeyed, without knowing that he did so because of her sincere unacquaintance with being refused. But he wondered still more.

"Meet Lady Luck," she said, and to his complete stupefaction, turned his head toward her and kissed him lightly on the mouth. "You have a funny, serious, wondering look I like," she explained. "Tracing something that keeps drifting away. Luck's been passing you, too, so I've decided to give you a break—if you want it. Do you?" she murmured, with a melting fall in her voice that drained his blood. Her lips hovered close to his; her hair almost brushed his face, with a tingling lure that took his breath.

Appalled at what he had almost done, he held her crushed between his hands till he could win back some degree of sense.

"I think it would be safer," he pleaded, hardly knowing what he said, "to be unlucky."

She looked at him with an oddly shadowed, reflective smile, as if the scruple intrigued her, or he had brushed some chord of memory.

"But I can be practical, too," she said, her eyes considering the bare camping place, "when the moon's clouded—though maybe you don't believe it. Suppose I were to offer you and your partner an outfit, a job and a big stake in the Yukon—would you trust your luck?"

Strange as that sounded, it was more reasonable than the moon madness he had escaped from.

"Whether I would or not," he said, "my partner wouldn't."

"He doesn't know what the stake is," Rose countered. "You're going North to look for gold. I can put it in your way in one throw. There's a fool in camp who's due to lose a gold mine—one that isn't his to lose. I can't tell you any more just now, except that the game is worth the risk. You're running some risks anyway as drifters in a camp where you've made an enemy of the range boss."

He could make nothing of that, except to wonder if Fallon was concerned in the mysterious gold secret she spoke of.

With a wary look beyond the circle of the fire, she said:

"I mustn't stay any longer. Think it over till I can see you again."

She drew from her blouse something that glittered in the dim light from the embers, and before he could guess her intention had slipped a handful of gold pieces into his pocket. Then she took her horse's rein. Startled out of the spell her voice had woven, he tried to return the gold.

"Don't be foolish," she protested. "You need it, and it isn't worth anything to me. It's just a little gift from Lady Luck, with lots of love and no strings. Please—"

He had caught her hand, but she made him open her fingers one by one before he could put the coins back in it.

"A man told me once," she said, "the words of a poem that would make a pretty song. About a rose that tore the strings of her purse and scattered its treasure on the ground. But this is only money, and a lot of it wouldn't be a treasure worth singing about . . . Please keep it. I shouldn't be waiting here."

He closed her resisting fingers over the last gold piece as they stood together. But while their hands were tangled, she drew a ring from one of hers and slipped it mischievously on the tip of his little finger.

At that moment a metallic thud on the wharf above them froze them both. A dark figure loomed with a bulky menace in the dusk.

Maitland thought of Fallon, but a flare from the fire revealed an apparition much more disturbing to him just then. Speed's apparent size was due to a roll of blankets on his shoulder.

The Westerner came down the sand and dropped his burden near the fire, still regarding the girl. After a moment he walked over to the horse and held the stirrup for her, with a gesture that was polite and implacable.

She waited before mounting, returning his stare with a look of interest.

"Lady," he said, pointing north, "up there is all Alaska and the Yukon Territory. If that ain't big enough huntin' range for you and me and my pardner to keep untangled in, it's too damned bad. But when I ask you to get the hell out of our camp, I mean stay out."

Her laugh was a ripple of spontaneous music. One would have thought she realized the sharp novelty of the challenge. She mounted easily and, looking back at Maitland, touched her fingers to her lips. The horse's hoofs ground softly in the sand, and she vanished.

Speed threw a fresh log on the fire and, after kicking it into flame, went up to the wharf to recover a frying pan he had dropped. Then he drew from his pocket a new bag of Durham, rolled a cigaret and lighted it with a brand from the fire before he so much as glanced at his partner, who was sitting on the timber with his chin sunk in his hands.

"Seems like the dude likes to gamble," he observed at last. "What he don't know about callin' a pair of deuces gives us the ponchos and smokes."

Maitland scarcely heard him. He half opened his hand to look at Rose's ring and shut it again quickly, as if he were holding a witch's bond. Some way must be found of returning it. The thought of Muriel stabbed him; while there had been no disloyalty in his mind he felt that this wouldn't have happened if he had been altogether blameless.

It was not till they turned in that Speed alluded to the subject that troubled him.

"From where I set," the Westerner observed musingly, "it looks like Fallon, the boss of that Nevada outfit, is goin' to run this camp and trail. His havin' traces of catamount and curly wolf in his pedigree, I don't question. But he's got somethin' else that makes a bunch of hard-rock, hard mouthed miners answer his jerk line. A quick hand, a cool head, and enough ornery guts to swing a twenty-four horse span of Nevada mules through the gates of hell, if him and Satan had a feud.

"What's the combination between him and the woman, I don't just figure. Maybe none, you think. Offhand, though, I'd call crossin' that man in any game a hairline play. And while ever' prospector has a title to choose the location of his own tombstone, I'd reckon that a young buck, say from Boston, would kind of regret havin' his grave dug for him this side of the summit, through not suspectin' when gettin' curious about a woman means flirtin' with the muzzles of a pair of .44's."

It seemed to his abashed listener that Speed was a little wide in one of his surmises, but the topic was difficult.

"Reckon these observations is needless, though," the gambler added, "you bein' so fireproof on the subjec' of women. Like when you ask me what does it matter, her bein' in camp."

Maitland had been on the brink of an explanation before. Now he put the ring in his pocket and remained silent.

CHAPTER VII

THE PASS

FOR hours the pack train had been tugging, cursing, halting and sliding through a drizzle of rain that soaked through lashings and shoulder straps, cut flesh to the raw, changed gravel to mud, and mixing with the churn

of hundreds of hoofs among the slippery wrack of cottonwoods and river timber, made heavy going.

Maitland still wondered at the sudden turn of events to which he owed his early start on the trail—hauling, not for Steiner, but for Steiner's "dude".

He had wakened that morning in misty darkness to find Speed already up and out. While looking for him over the crown of the beach, he had come on Steiner, packing one of the pintos by firelight, with a lopsided burden to which he had added as an afterthought various pans and implements, all secured by an intricate diamond hitch. On Maitland's expressing some doubt as to whether it would ride, the Jew, feeling perhaps that hunger and the raw morning might lead him to reconsider his partner's refusal of low wages, had cannily offered a wager that he could not rope a better pack on the other horse.

When it came to the test, Steiner's bronco had taken fright at the clinking pans behind it and bolted, dragging its team mate with it by a connecting line, and had torn a path like a twister through the half awakened camp, to the terror of all the horses in it. Their rush was checked at last by a tent they pulled down, so that Maitland was able to stop them, but on doing so found himself confronting an angry crowd and the quizzical eyes of Fallon, the camp boss, who champed an unlighted cigar as he shot questions at the supposed offender.

The pintos were known to be Steiner's, but as he had vanished into obscurity, Maitland's position was unfortunate. None of these men could imagine a hitch like Steiner's being thrown with sincere intentions. The stampede looked like a malicious prank, and Fallon's threat of roping the perpetrator to the ill made pack hardly too severe. Maitland admitted having packed the quieter horse.

"What give you title to pack a horse in this camp?"

While trying to frame an answer to that difficult question, he heard Speed's cool drawl behind him.

"Who wants to know?"

Fallon turned a measuring stare on the interlocutor.

"The miners' committee. Or maybe—" with an ironical grimace—"you want to know who I am?"

"You make me kind of curious," the outlaw acknowledged.

"You're the man—" Fallon studied him with a little more precision—"who swum the pinto ashore yesterday. Haulin' for the Jew?"

"No. Neither of us."

"Are you a horsethief or a liar?" Fallon inquired deliberately.

Flame sparked in Speed's eyes; his hand made an instinctive movement, hardly visible, so instantly had it been checked in obedience to the promise given his partner. But Fallon's gun covered him in the same twinkling. That the gun did not speak, in that quiver of arrest, was proof of a consummately quick hand and brain.

"You've got all the makin's of a bad man, except guts," the camp boss said, clipping the words between his strong teeth, as he shifted his cigar.

His move, however, to attempt executing his threat was fortunately delayed by a statement from one of the prospectors who happened to have seen Steiner pack the bronco in question.

Before the Jew could be located, the dude, for whom he had contracted to haul, appeased the anger of the camp by offering to settle any claims for damage, and Fallon passed judgment by forbidding Steiner to use horses again on the trail.

To the partners, his contemptuous parting injunction was:

"You two drifters will have to haul in a lot of slack if you figure on workin' this trail. One more audible bluff from you, and you'll be called plenty."

That was taken in silence, and the unpleasant fact was brought home to Maitland that the law he had bound his partner to respect was embodied in Fallon as elected head of the miners' committee. Also that he himself had

been the occasion of their first clash with it.

But then came a swift and surprising adjustment. Steiner's dude, who introduced himself as Garnet, engaged them to haul for him at the price Speed had first named, and bought the team from the Jew, when he appeared. To Maitland this had an effect of marvel, but the Westerner accepted it as a normal turn of the rapid wheel of chance that spins in gold camps. Nor was Steiner depressed by the outcome. Equably counting his receipts from the sale, he announced his intention of starting a store in Skagway with his outfit and further purchases.

"Gold is where you find it," he observed. "If it's put in my hands, I don't need a pick and shovel. Let the saps dig for it."

Speed concurred:

"Reckon that your idea ain't so foolish, neither,"

They had been hired practically in the dark, and Maitland was impressed by his first clear glimpse of their employer in the dawning light. Fair and sparely built, with a clean shaven, intelligent face, Garnet wore expensive outing clothes that fitted him like a glove, from tan leg boots to a spotless and rather rakish looking felt hat. His tie was fastened by a nugget pin to a silky brown sport shirt, which was in itself a rarity.

Nevertheless, he spoke the Western miners' argot with natural ease, but with more than a trace of cultivation in his even, accentless voice.

His hands, well kept and free from scar or callous, suggested a gambler's; though, had he been one, he and Speed would probably have betrayed a quicker understanding. Maitland noticed that he studied them unobtrusively while Speed was remaking Steiner's pack with an authentic diamond hitch, and that Speed, for his part, concentrated a rather puzzled attentiveness on the goods they were to haul. And Maitland, too, glanced over the dude's supplies.

GARNET'S outfit was an odd one, unencumbered by mining tools, or by any instruments that might give a clue to his purpose in the North. It was rather like the equipment a rich man might choose for a long camping tour. Two game rifles and fishing rods showed that he hoped for some diversion on the way. The dunnage included many articles of luxury unusual on the trail, and among the ample provisions were several of those refinements which old-timers mistrust, such as dehydrated fruit and vegetables.

Of this weight, Speed had chosen less than a third for the first haul. By the routine of the trail, prospectors moved their outfits in relays—uptrail as far as they could pack between midnight and noon, and backtrail for other loads during the remaining hours. The pintos carried about a hundred and fifty pounds each; Maitland and Speed each shouldered a pack of eighty pounds, and Garnet, who had preferred not to be conspicuous for lack of a burden, had started with a light haversack of the dessicated food.

It soon became evident that Garnet's contact with mining towns had been more direct than with the hardships of the trail. The pack train wound in a disjointed snake line out of the flats into a narrowing canyon, which offered new impediments of mountain timber, and gave down more steeply till the river cascaded below in a white and noisy fall. Halts came in fitful, bucking pauses, often adding to the misery by checking them, fully weighted, on shelving mud banks. Garnet, who trailed behind, began to remark rather febrilely about the increasing size and weight of his pack. It was a common illusion of fatigue, and as the train was in motion at the time, they were unable to relieve his mind or his shoulders of the burden.

While skirting a difficult slope, Maitland, hearing a sudden gasp and slip of earth from behind him, turned to see their employer go sliding down the mountain

side. They pulled the pintos out of line and scrambled down to recover him. He had come to rest in a cedar muskeg from which his pack made him as helpless to rise as an overturned turtle.

On lifting him to his feet, however, they were astounded by the size and weight of his pack. The rain had seeped through its canvas covering, and swelled out the dehydrated potatoes and apples till the folds burst and spilled over with a bumper crop of prodigious fruit. Garnet saw no occasion for leg slapping in this incident, nor did he join at all in their peals of laughter. But when they regained the trail and were fortunate enough to recover a place in the line, he held on to his pack with a kind of combative exasperation.

At last a ring of axes and pans, floating up from a mountain hollow through the rain, and the trail dipped toward a camp, which was pleasantly announced by the aroma of coffee and wet pine burning.

Under some dripping boughs where the needles spread a mudless carpet, Speed unslung the packs.

"Belly up to the bar for some close harmony, cow hands," he sang out cheerily. "We've hit the camp of Liarsville."

Garnet stood bowed under his vegetables and asked in a spent voice how far they had come. Mud had daubed his faultless clothes and his distinguished features with a print of gloom like that of Bunyan's Pilgrim, whose sins grew to so huge a burden on his shoulders.

The distance was said to be five miles.

"Maybe," Speed added as an encouragement, "they call it Liarsville in mem-r'y of whoever said it was five miles."

If Garnet was encouraged, he did not show it. While they made camp he collapsed against the mired sack and glumly watched the pack train stream in—a long line of jaded horses and mules whose various original colors were splashed with a rough camouflage of mud. There were three goats in the train, chosen for pack animals on the theory, perhaps, that they were sure footed and would yield a milk supply.

A red shirted prospector tagged at the end of the line, located there because his burros were balky. Behind him came the strangest carrier of all—a mutinous brown bull on which some homesteader had loaded a heavy pack. Whether his provident idea was beef steaks, as Maitland suggested, or bonanza rumors—Speed's guess—the bull was not a willing party to it. Its sense of indignity was inflamed by the prospector's red shirt, and its owner skidded along through the mud, dragging on the nose rope while the miner defended his rear with a pick.

Even this failed to bring a smile to Garnet's mud caked countenance. When they carried up water from the river, he roused himself to unpack three snowy towels, a case of fine English razors, and some foil wrapped cakes of delicately scented soap—which added to their dim conjectures the thought that they might be hauling for a barber.

He showed so little desire to continue his travels that they left him in camp to rest and hauled up another load from Skagway on the night trail. Speed chose the hours for trailing; the brevity of their stop at the base camp effectually precluded the chance of meeting Rose. Their return in the morning wakened Garnet and found him in better humor. But he had been hearing, during their absence, some sinister rumors about the trail ahead, and proposed that they go up and look it over, while he finished his sleep.

A scrubbing, a good breakfast and morning sunlight sent the two partners off on this excursion in a buoyant mood, discounting Garnet's misgivings, and unprepared for the grim reality they soon encountered. Across the river and beyond the camp, a steep broken track, scarred out by the pack animals of earlier comers, led them into tangled mountain ravines that reeked with a mephitic odor of death. The shambles became more ghastly as they climbed.

In the dips of the so-called trail a series of quagmires had been enlarged to

small mud lakes by the wear of successive hoofs around the rim. Where the tundra remained firm it was like a crust over a stew of mire. The swollen carcasses of dead horses lay floating or half bedded in muskegs and sloughs, with midges in smoking clouds above them. On sheer mountain sides the trail dwindled at times to a cattle track, and its hazards for burdened horses and men were cruelly proved by relics that lay scattered in the canyon troughs.

Some travelers who had lost their horses were struggling to hand haul their packs through a wallow not more than a mile above Liarsville. It was all the headway they had been able to make since morning. Others, incredibly plastered with mud, and bearing the wan stamp of defeat in their faces, were backtrailing toward camp. These were trail veterans who took ordinary hardship with a smile. A prospector who had sunk his outfit expressed something of what he felt.

"When I get home," declared the backtrailer, "I'm goin' to tell my kids about this trail, and if ever' last one of the little hellions don't bust down and blubber just to hear about it, I'll whale the daylights out'n 'em."

Plainly, one look at this would be enough for Garnet.

As they stood considering the dismal prospect, they were joined by a man whom Maitland recognized through disguising mud smears. It was the old-timer, Brent, who had spoken of horses on the lighter.

"Pretty, ain't it," Brent commented, spitting tobacco juice into the slough.

"It would look a heap better," Speed said, "if the camp got together and graded a trail. A few days' work would corduroy these muskegs."

Apparently that proposition had been made, and had been countered by Fallon and his outfit, who were in a hurry to cross the pass, could afford the risk, and held that the season was too late to allow the delay. As for the men who were short of horses, it was their hard luck. A stampede was a stampede.

"Fallon's got guts," Speed muttered, "but I don't seem to like 'em, someway."

"A bunch of us," said Brent, with a smolder in his tired eyes, "aim to call a camp meetin' at one o'clock—when the crowd's in and before the backtrailin' starts, so we can get a full vote. That's why I spoke to ye. Can we figure on you boys to stand in?"

Speed looked at his partner. It was their one remaining chance of keeping Garnet on the trail.

"You can count on us to vote," he said, "but that's all."

Brent signified that he asked for nothing more and, leaving them, went up the trail to collect more voters.

When they returned to Liarsville the camp was crowded. Here and there the dispirited faces of mud draggled men showed that Fallon's decision meant the end of the trail for some of them, but they accepted it as the harsh law of the stampede. Brent's chance, even of a hearing, was more than doubtful. Their trail had reached an impasse, almost at its starting point.

CHAPTER VIII

A BET IS RAISED

BEFORE they reached the cache they met Garnet coming toward them, looking refreshed and clean as he stepped carefully along the river path. He listened in silence to Speed's tactful account of the trail and agreed to attend the mass meeting.

But he was visibly more interested in some sounds that came to them from the vicinity of the bridge. A metallic "come-on" chant rang stridently through the hollow, above a babel of voices and the river's brawl.

"Not a game of chance, friends. A simple test of skill. The quickness of the hand deceives the eye . . . "

"Suppose we give the game a spin while waiting for one o'clock," Garnet suggested. "You need some relaxation."

"You can spin it," Speed declined. "If I had the jack it wouldn't relax me none to give it to a shell rigger."

The sunlight that pierced the canyon mist fell on a crowd around the dealer's pitch table. Many of the men, not following the game, had simply herded there to wait for the backtrail to clear. A player had just placed a bet. From the higher ground at the bridgehead they saw it to be the man with the sheepskin coat—Pete's partner, Bill. Noticeably drunk, Bill was swaying on his heels. Fallon and one of his outfit stood near, watching him play.

"I guess we'll pass this," said Garnet prudently.

Speed did not answer. His attention had been arrested by the pallid, narrow eyed face of the dealer, on which the sunlight fell squarely.

"Seems like I've seen that bird somewheres," he muttered.

The dealer was paying a bet to Bill Owens, who hovered over the pitch table, his fumbling hands spilling over with money he was trying to count.

"Wha's money!" Owens was bleating. "I know where's a gold mine in the Yukon. Rich! Worth a million doll'rs!"

"Takes a drunk and gold crazy miner to support this kind of deadfall," Speed commented. "He's framed to lose."

While Bill wavered over the table, the yellow head of his young partner appeared beside him. Pete was trying to pull him out of the game. Ignored by Owens, the boy said something to Fallon —not quite audible from the bridge. The big man was lighting a cigar. When Pete spoke again, more insistently, Fallon brushed him out of the way with an impatient, backward fling of his hand. The blow might have been unintentional, but the hand was heavy and ringed. It cut the boy's cheek and sent him stumbling.

"Damned shame," said Garnet.

Speed swore to himself. Friendly hands set the boy on his feet, and there was a flare of anger from the crowd, which subsided, however, before the indifference of Fallon's broad back. Pete broke away and went up the canyon while Owens, oblivious to everything but the stakes he was handling, shifted them vaguely from one fist to the other.

The dealer hastened to cover the incident.

"Interestin', entertainin' and instructive, gents. A simple test of skill . . . "

Still intent on the man's face, Speed crossed the bridge and edged into the crowd for a closer view, the two others following.

" . . . Not a game of chance, miners. The quickness of the hand—"

Here the dealer's voice hung trailing, as his cold eyes, roving over the crowd, suddenly encountered and locked with Speed's. A look of incredulous wonder pierced his mask, and his jaws came as near falling as the discipline of his calling allowed. In the next moment he had recovered his voice and continued his ballyhoo, but the tone was slightly flat, and his eyes strayed back again in a haunted way toward Speed, as if for assurance that they had been deceived. A few of the onlookers glanced around curiously, but were none the wiser.

"Two thousand," maundered Bill, undecided.

"Shoot it, Bill," said Fallon. "I'll copper you some in case you lose."

He laid a small pack of gold pieces on the table, as Bill lurched forward and placed his double handful of money.

The dealer's eyes, which had returned to the game, quivered upward as a clear drawl suddenly spoke over the heads of the crowd.

"I'll bet a thousand on Bill to win!"

The discovery that it was Speed who had spoken astonished no one quite as much as Maitland, who knew the limits of his resources. The offer had been made to the dealer, but Fallon wheeled around with a scowl that darkened when he recognized the speaker.

"Meanin' who?" the camp boss demanded.

"I was talkin' to the dealer," said Speed coolly, "but I didn't bar no takers."

"It don't take money to call *you*," Fallon returned, with a sneering barb in his tone. "What give you the notion you had a thousand dollars."

"The imagin'ry jack I see you playin'," said Speed. "A blank bet between you and me would be interestin' and instructive."

The crowd opened curiously between the two men. Cocking his cigar, Fallon drew a large roll from his pocket and slapped down a counted sum on the table.

"There's a thousand says you're a cheap fourflusher," he said.

"Look out!" The words fell from the dealer's lips in an involuntary murmur.

"Oh, he won't shoot," said Fallon easily. "He's one of them would-be gunmen. Chews a lot but ain't got no fangs. Ain't got no money neither."

Speed, in fact, had not moved except to reach into his pocket for money that was not there. He had not looked for this result, and was still framing his next move. None the less, his composure remained perfect, even when, to his surprise, his fingers closed over a wad of bills. Fortune sometimes favors the absolute gambler. This time the means of her miracle was Garnet, who had quietly slipped the roll into his pocket.

"I mean money," growled Fallon, at the first hint of delay. "You can't run a whisperin' bluff in this game."

DOUBT struggled with fear in the dealer's face when the insult was ignored. Speed walked up to the table, stripping a sheaf of clean one hundred dollar bills from Garnet's roll, and laid it alongside Fallon's. Then his eyes pinned the dealer.

"You can deal this any way you figure healthy," he said. "On'y remember I'm backin' Bill to win."

The dealer's pale visage turned paler; he lowered his head to conceal a twitching of his mouth.

There was a craning moment of silence. A hum ran through the crowd as the dealer lifted the shells, and Fallon ripped out an oath of chagrin and unbelief. Bill had won. It would have been hard to say whether Bill's hands or the dealer's were the more unsteady when the bet was paid. The dealer moved in a kind of trance, blind to the vengeance in Fallon's stare. Speed picked up his own and the other's stake, and was turning away when Fallon called him back.

"What I took ye for," snarled the camp boss. "A grab-and-run gambler. Pull up there, feller. The play ain't through yet."

A slight twist in the corner of Speed's mouth showed that this was not unexpected.

"No," he said, "the play ain't through yet, on'y it's a new game. If you call this bunco set-up gamblin', I've got better use for my time. But if you want to chance your money on a man size play, I'll give you cards right now. They's a stretch of trail between here and the bridge up the line that needs fixin' almighty bad. Horses and outfits has been lost on it. You're the boss of this camp, and you've blocked the move to fix it because you've a big string of mules and can take a chance of lightin' through in one haul. You don't give a damn for the small miner who has to relay his pack over that slough with one horse or none.

"Well, some of us figure different. Four days' work with the camp drafted will put the trail in shape. It's the on'y chance for a lot of the boys who've sunk their last red to get here. You can't run a white miner's camp without takin' count of the common prospector. That's rock bottom, stampede or none. If you doubt it, Fallon, and want to gamble, I'll bet you this yer thousand the camp ain't back of ye."

The stillness in the canyon was complete, save for the gush of the river. Quietly as the words had been spoken, they had touched every instinct of the crowd at once. It was like the lighting of a fuse. A sputter of comment began to grow. Fallon's men stared from the speaker to their leader in mute expec-

tancy; even Bill's bleared eyes showed a smolder of sense. The dealer of the shell game stood watching Speed in a motionless tension.

Shrewd malice narrowed Fallon's eyes.

"I'll take your bet," he said. "These men know what a delay would mean. If you think you can halt 'em, the idea will cost you a thousand and somethin' more."

Now that it had an outlet, the response of the crowd broke loose.

"I'm with you, brother," a man called out to Speed. "That's talkin'—" and similar indorsements mounted over the voices of dissent.

"Hi, Brent!" some one roared up the canyon between his hands. "Bring in your men! We're goin' to mend that trail!"

"Hold on," barked Fallon, above the tumult, "and swivel your muzzle loadin' brains on the question of what this crook's playin' for. Who is he? Where's he from? Blowed into camp two days ago a busted drifter; now he's flashin' money. Ever meet a 'fixer' on the gold trails? Well, the inside crowd in the Yukon is workin' hard to plaster ever' good location before the stampede arrives, and here's a slick frame to freeze you out."

The argument was far fetched, but cunningly gaged to an audience of credulous, impatient, gold fevered men.

Speed parried it promptly.

"That won't hold gravel," he declared. "The river don't freeze till the first week in October. Four days won't hurt that margin, and most of the camp will gain time on a good trail."

"What you ain't primed to answer," returned Fallon, "is who you are, and what you're doin' here with that roll of money and no outfit."

Speed creased a cigaret paper and poured some tobacco into it.

"You're switchin' your bet," he said evenly. "The question is whether the boys want to make a trail. But if you want to talk personal—" one of the strings of the tobacco bag was in his teeth and the word was emphasized as he jerked it tight— "how does it happen that a man who's so all-fired anxious to see ever' one get to Dawson, spends his time makin' this miner drunk and persuadin' him to bust hisself at a skin game?" He rolled the cigaret, to all appearances hardly glancing at Fallon. "I've said you don't care a damn about the small miner. There's one proof of it." He moistened the cigaret paper and looked calmly at Fallon over it, both hands away from his guns. "Another is that coward's lick you took at the kid awhile back."

The cool temerity of the challenge held the crowd in a spell, while Fallon's eyes narrowed to the watchfulness of a cat's and his muscles gathered in a tension that could be felt rather than seen.

"You ask where I come from," Speed continued, smoothing the cigaret lengthwise between his fingers. "I come from a State where a man low enough to do a thing like that would be booted out of a camp of horsethieves."

THE dealer ducked below his table; the crowd backed away from the two men in a stumbling rush. Fallon's hands flashed to his guns and stopped there, a puzzled seam deepening between his eyes. His thought, too swift to be definite, was merely that he could not imagine any one taking such a chance unless certain of an advantage. On Speed's part it was sheer gambling—one of those reckless yet clear headed gestures of which instances are not unknown in the annals of the West, where gunmen have been challenged and held without the touching of a weapon.

The hush was suddenly broken by Brent, who had arrived with his backers and, judging it time to cut this fuse, called for a vote and showdown.

The uproar forced Fallon to suspend dealings with Speed while he met a different menace. Heads were counted in a confused din. A majority showed for

Brent's proposition, but many had not declared themselves either way.

"That's no showdown!" bellowed Fallon. "To fix the trail you've got to bar it. Try that and you'll damn soon find how much of the camp's behind me. You can't bar it!"

"We'll go to bedrock on that right now," Brent shot back. "We've got the man who'll see the job done, and the miners' committee sure needs a new chairman. Get behind this, men. Who'll back the stranger yer for trail boss?"

There was a tangled burst of enraged and jubilant shouts. In the confusion it was a moment before Speed could make himself heard. This was more than he had counted on.

"I ain't the man for the job," he said.

"Why ain't ye?" demanded the old-timer, frowning at the unexpected obstacle.

"I'm a stranger and I ain't patient enough to argue with suspicions. Put up one of your own men."

"Patience be damned," growled a sun browned Arizona miner. "Who all's askin' you to be patient?"

When Speed shook his head, a shadow crossed the faces of his supporters. Aware of what they were thinking, his jaw tightened grimly. The consequences he had moved too swiftly to count were clear both ways: to accept meant a feud that would end in breaking his agreement with his partner; to refuse was likely to mean the defeat of Brent's proposition and of the chance of holding Garnet on the trail.

Fallon, sure of his ground now, lighted a fresh cigar and flicked the match meditatively in Speed's direction.

"Feller that started this talk about fixin' trails don't look so hot when it comes to barrin' 'em."

"He don't fer sure." One of his men laughed derisively. "Ain't got the guts to try it."

Gloom darkened over Brent's faction as Speed allowed this to pass. Nothing ranked lower with them than "taking water" after a challenge.

"The man don't live," said Fallon complacently, "who can bar a trail when my outfit gets ready to go through. As for this meddler, he don't amount to a puff of smoke, and I'll show you he don't." And the camp boss put his hands on his guns. "I called him yesterday for a liar and a horsethief, whichever was his fightin' word. But that was too mild. I say now that he's a sneaking liar and a yeller coyote, both."

The shell dealer, whose eyes had never left Speed's face, dived into the crowd. No one else saw the lightning gesture with which the outlaw jerked his guns. There was a glint in both his hands a split fraction of a second before the .45's flashed and roared. Fallon's weapons were wrecked in the holsters as he drew. The third shot went sidewise at another mark on the near edge of the gaming table, where a man dropped a gun from a nerveless hand, his wrist streaming blood.

Speed backed away, eyes raking the crowd, guns held close and ready.

"I told you I wasn't patient, and I ain't," he said, in a voice Maitland had never heard. "But bein' elected camp boss on a platform of cussedness, I accept accordin'. Nothin' on legs will cross Porcupine Bridge till the trail from here to there is in shape, and in good shape. The trail is barred for four days' work. If any one has doubts about my havin' the guts to make that good, they can signify their views here and now by sayin' liar and coyote!"

TO BE CONTINUED

A FISTFUL of WATER

A Story of Nicaragua

By EVERETT H. CLARK

LIEUTENANT BINGHAM swore softly. He had never before suffered a serious casualty in any skirmish with the Nicaraguan banditry, but this looked bad. Kirby must be stretched out somewhere, too badly hurt to call for help. They combed the knoll, and went back over it again. They hallooed and shouted his name, but there was no answer from the missing man.

"By the lord," said Bingham, "we stay till we find him. He—he must be dead, or knocked out. I'm damned if I'll leave him for the gooks to find. Keep at it."

They kept at it, piercing every bush and thicket. They questioned Ross and Wheeler, who had been near Kirby when the fighting began. They went far afield in their search. The sun climbed higher and poured its heat on them from directly overhead. Bingham and Sergeant Claflin rested for a moment, and each looked into the other's troubled eyes.

"Do you think he might have been—"

"Captured? A knock on the head, somehow, and then dragged away?"

"It's possible."

"It begins to look like the only solution," said Bingham. "We'll have to take off after this bandit Chevez and, believe me, I won't stop chasing him till—"

"Look, Lieutenant! On the trail. More Marines. From some other outfit."

A feeling of guilty uneasiness took hold of Bingham. He was supposed to be miles away, in the vicinity of Las Vueltas, and he had kept his patrol out overtime. And now, searching for Kirby, he had gone even farther astray. His men looked like scarecrows, too. These Marines from some other outfit could only be the new detail from Telepaneca, led by Captain Pressman, who, according to

the vague rumors that had preceded him, was a fussy sort.

The first scattered files of an advance guard formation became visible through the trees. Bingham frowned, and then shrugged his broad shoulders. He was a big man, well over six feet tall. Disordered strands of brown hair strayed from under his campaign hat, tickling his forehead. His keen blue eyes, slightly worried now, seemed to look along his prominent nose, rather than over it. The shirtsleeve was cut away from his right arm and the arm itself, hastily bandaged, hung in a sling.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we'll just have to let 'em know we're here."

They hailed the newcomers, a strong patrol of about thirty. A small, sharp nosed captain, whose delicate hands showed perfectly manicured nails, rode forward on a chestnut mare. Bingham had never seen Captain Pressman before, and immediately disliked the cold, snobbish blankness of his gray eyes.

"What patrol is this?" asked the captain. "Who's in command?"

"Lieutenant Bingham, sir, out of Quilali. I'm Lieutenant Bingham."

"Hm. You're miles from where you should be. What's the matter with your arm?"

"We had a contact a few hours ago, Captain. Killed a couple of bandits, but one of my men's missing. Been looking for him ever since."

"What? What's this?" Pinpoints of indignation broke through the blankness of the gray eyes. "You lost a man?"

Bingham scowled. It was a calamity, but it wasn't a crime. Anybody might lose a man in action.

"Yes, sir," he said. "He must be dead or captured. But I'll get him before I go in. I'll get him back if I have to chase Ignacio Chevez from here to Honduras."

The captain's left hand gripped the saddlehorn.

"What?" he barked. "It was Chevez? You sought contact with Chevez when you had only these few men in your command?"

"Certainly," said Bingham, puzzled. "I've tangled with him before—several times. Studied his methods a lot and—"

The captain picked up his reins.

"What kind of irresponsible planning is this? Where are your accompanying weapons?"

"I've got a Thompson."

"Where are your supplies?"

"I ran out of chow yesterday, sir, but—"

The older officer wheeled his horse about.

"I've heard enough, Lieutenant," he snapped. "Your wound alone makes you unfit for leadership. Get your men together and go back to Quilali—ahead of me."

Bingham bit his lip. The captain didn't understand, didn't appreciate as yet the conditions in this bandit infested corner of the country. He didn't realize that a small, mobile patrol was much better than a large one. He didn't know, apparently, that Bingham had hiked his shoes off, had gotten several worthwhile contacts, had concentrated on this elusive and much wanted Chevez, and had even been nicknamed El Grande—the big one—by the bandits.

They feared Bingham and his patrol more than they feared any other group of Marines, and Bingham in turn felt that his efforts against Chevez were the most important thing in his life; success would mean prestige, recognition as a definite somebody in the Corps. Besides this, there was an immediate and urgent reason for not going back yet. Kirby had to be found.

"Wait a minute, Captain," he said. "This wound don't bother me, and my men have lived off the country plenty of times. The Chevez gang—"

"I said," the captain repeated crisply, "get your men together and start for Quilali."

"But who's going to hunt for Kirby? He's—well, these men of mine are kind of like a family. I've had the same gang on patrol after patrol. Kirby's one of us, and—"

"I'll take care of Kirby," Pressman said. "Move your unit out."

Bingham hesitated, but not for long. Then he remembered that these newcomers knew nothing of the ground they had fought on and searched over, so he sent Sergeant Claflin back to help in the hunt for Kirby.

The homeward trail followed the crest of a ridge, rising and dipping through pine woods and bracken fern. Hours passed. They reached the trail junction at Las Cruces and dropped downward on the long slope toward Quilali. Bingham realized that he was tired and hungry and would be glad to have Doc Hutchins fix his arm.

They sighted the village, splashed through Teocintal Creek, and were greeted by Lieutenant Macklan, the gray haired ex-quartermaster who had been in command of the garrison for so long. Macklan followed Bingham into the sickbay and stood by while Doc Hutchins worked.

"I missed the guy that pinked me in the arm, Doc," said the big lieutenant, "but I've got his number. He had a funny shaped patch on his shirt that—"

"What kind of egg is the new captain?" asked Macklan nervously.

Bingham pursed his lips.

"Kind of stiff necked, I'd say, but I guess he'll do. I thought he was a complete washout till I found he was going to stay back there and hunt for Kirby. If he doesn't get in tonight I'll take my gang back there tomorrow and relieve him."

Hutchins fastened the bandage. He turned to put away his instruments and hesitated, abruptly, scissors in one hand and the big roll of adhesive tape in the other.

"What's that?" he asked. "That commotion outside? Did something happen? Somebody else coming into camp?"

Macklan went to the door.

"Must be Captain Pressman."

"As soon as this?" Bingham exclaimed. "Has he found Kirby already?"

Sergeant Claflin burst into the room, red faced and bristling.

"I'm under arrest, Lieutenant," he announced excitedly, "and I don't give a damn if I am. This new captain ain't human. Never even tried to find Kirby. It's a matter for grave concern and extensive planning, he said. Said there'd be no more haphazard patrolling. Said he'd teach system and organization and sound tactics. 'Tactics, my eye,' I told him. 'Lieutenant Bingham does things, instead of standing around spilling theories.' And with that the captain slaps me under arrest and hikes for town on your heels."

A HALF DOZEN palm thatched huts bordered the little compound. Chickens scratched in the weeds, and sharp ribbed pigs, lean and active as dogs, squabbled nasally over such morsels of garbage as the *caseria* of Cerro Blanco could afford to throw away. Ignacio Chevez straddled a hammock that was slung, tropical fashion, in a deep U, instead of being stretched taut. His felt hat, flaunting the red and black ribbon of organized banditry, was pushed forward over his beady black eyes, his hands were folded across the cartridge studded belt that circled his paunch, and the heavy lines of his molasses colored face were wrinkled in deep thought.

Kirby, the captured Marine, lay securely bound at Ignacio's feet. His hair was matted where an ugly, unhealed wound showed through. But his unwashed face, marked by the deep furrows of several days' suffering, still showed defiance and stubborn contempt for what might lie in store for him.

"I tell you," he grunted, "I don't know anything about him. Let your messengers find out for you if you want to know about Lieutenant Bingham."

"Bin'am," repeated Ignacio. "An awkward name. I call him El Grande."

Mateo, leaning against Candida's rickety hut, and Pablo Real, and the man named Guatusa, all scowled, and Mateo said:

"What of these others, Don Ignacio? Is El Grande the only American, and is Quilali the only town? To Ocotal and Apali come more airplanes than ever before, bringing always new Marines. In San Fernando and San Albino they buy additional horses and mules. Even in Yali and Telepaneca, to the south, they are active. I say we should kill this *Yanqui* prisoner and slip away toward the Chipoton area."

"No," said Ignacio. "We will wait for more news from Quilali."

Pablo Real scratched his bullet shaped head.

"Abelardo has sent news that Quilali also prepares; that El Grande, because of his wound, will not march. Yet you sent Abelardo back to get more information. I, too, say that we should kill this pig and seek safety."

Mateo stepped forward, fingering the long *machete* at his belt, but Ignacio leaped to his feet.

"No!" he thundered. "I have suffered enough indignities from this El Grande. Did he not keep us from looting the Costello farm and drive us from our plunder in Barrillal? Did he not kill Sinforeano and José? And now fate has given me the bait that will draw him to me. Why else do you think I let the Americans know that I hold a captive? Sooner or later El Grande will come to his rescue, and I—I shall be ready to welcome him."

There was a slight commotion at the edge of the compound where the trail wound eastward along the hillside.

"It is Abelardo," said Pablo, "back once more from Quilali."

Abelardo trotted across the open space.

"They are starting," he panted, "with mules, many men and machine guns. And it is said by everybody that hundreds of others start, at the same time, from every town that is held by Marines."

"And El Grande?" asked Ignacio.

Abelardo shook his head.

"He will not march. Some say it is because of his wound. Some of the others, who are his close friends, say he is in disgrace."

Ignacio grinned in satisfaction.

"No matter. He will march before many days pass. He will come for this *rubio* we have captured."

Mateo stepped forward, fear showing in his shifting eyes.

"But these thousands are starting today," he said. "Are we to wait like rats in a trap while they close in upon us from all sides?"

"You fools," said Ignacio, raising his voice. "Do you not know that hairs slip easily between the teeth of a comb? We will hide this captive and hide all our arms till these thousands pass. These cattle—" he waved a thick arm toward the ragged majority of his followers—"will scatter and pretend to work in the fields.

"But myself, I shall stay here, with whichever others are not afraid, and if Americans question me I shall be a simple *agricultura* who knows nothing of outlaws. These great, blundering groups of Marines think to squeeze me between them. They have spent days preparing. They clutch at me, and they will get—a fistful of water." He plunged his hand into the round bottomed waterjug that sat in the doorway, and brought his fist out, dripping. "A fistful of water, nothing more.

"These foolish hundreds will pass and gather in San Juan, where they will sit and confer for several days as Americans always do. And while they are wagging their heads in disappointment I, Ignacio Chevez, will set a trap against the coming of El Grande. A trap in which even your poor shooting, Mateo, will be accurate, for the range will be closely measured. El Grande, I say, must die."

The captive Marine turned his head and gazed steadily up at Chevez.

"You're full of sausage, fat bandit," he said. "It will take more than a robber of women like you to get the guy you call El Grande."

Ignacio did not answer him.

A COLONEL mounted his horse and surveyed the men and animals of the Ocotal detachment with approval. Forty-two miles eastward, a serpentine file of khaki clad figures nosed out through the pass that guards the exit from San Albino. Far to the south a trickle of Marines turned their backs on Yali, and another unit left from Telepaneca. In the plaza at San Fernando an impatient column awaited the order to start.

And in Quilali, fifty-odd armed and eager outlaw hunters tightened cinches on pack mules, darted into houses after last minute items of equipment, or stood talking in groups. Apart from them, glumly eyeing the bustle of activity, was Lieutenant Bingham in long trousers and an undershirt. His injured arm hung free of its sling, but he still favored it a little when he moved.

Lieutenant Macklan, belted and armed and harnessed with field glasses, dispatch case and pistol lanyard, dodged between two mules and emerged from the confusion.

"The captain," he said to Bingham, "is going to take that sore backed goat with the broken ear along, too. Says he may need it for a spare."

"Yeah," grunted Bingham. "A lieutenant with a little nick in his arm can't go, but a sore backed mule is plenty good enough to make the grade."

"What do you want to go for? I thought you didn't approve of this drive."

"Approve of it? Hell, no. It's a rotten, lowdown outrage. Day after day's delay, organization of all these other columns, complication of plans, demands for more men, red tape and apple sauce. And in the meantime, what about poor Kirby? Lord knows what Chevez has done to him by this time. You're right. I don't approve of this drive, but since they're doing it, I'd rather be along than sit here with Doc Hutchins for a week or so."

"Well," said Macklan, "you'll be in command."

Bingham snorted contemptuously.

"Of what? A couple dozen sick, lame and lazy left-behinds. I've been an eight-ball ever since Captain Pressman got here. Why didn't he send me out, or send *somebody* out, the day after Kirby got lost—the day Chevez sent in his boast by grapevine that he had a prisoner? Why'd the captain stir up headquarters and send messages and organize this hullabaloo all through the area? He'll only get Kirby killed instead of rescuing him."

"I dunno," Macklan said thoughfully. "The colonel in Ocotal seems to like the plan."

"Bah. That's another cold deck I'm bucking. Just when Pressman gets here, they send a new colonel into the area, too. A colonel that hasn't been in the hills since Dewey took Manila. And the colonel, because Pressman got a medal overseas, believes all the skipper says. A big concentration. A big drive to rescue Kirby. Boloney!"

Macklan glanced over his shoulder.

"Not so loud, you big bolshevik."

"I'll talk louder than this before I'm through. I'll—" He caught sight of Sergeant Claflin coming toward him. "Something on your mind, Sergeant?"

"There certainly is, Lieutenant," Claflin replied. "The captain just took Wheeler off the detail."

"What of it?"

"Why, Wheeler's the last of the old gang that used to go out with us. It makes it a clean sweep."

"A clean sweep?"

"Yes, sir. You've got to stay here, Lieutenant. I'm under arrest. The skipper had the Doc put half of us on the sick list on account of insect bites; he shifted Ross and Tatro and Dubois over to San Albino last time the ration train went out, and now he's put Wheeler on the beach."

"Well," said Bingham dully, "I still don't see—"

"He ain't got a single man," Claflin asserted emphatically, "that knows the first thing about the Chevez gang. He

don't know that flanking trick they use, nor the downhill ambush. This captain's a pig headed loon, Lieutenant, and—"

"That's enough, Claflin," said Bingham sharply.

The sergeant complied unwillingly, and Macklan ambled off to give his attention to the outgoing men. The column was eddying into formation. As Bingham watched he mentally chewed on Claflin's words. There was no doubt, he reflected, that the captain looked upon him as a misfit—a chance taker, too headstrong to be trusted. This prejudice probably reflected on his men, too, and would explain why Pressman had weeded them all out. Still, the sergeant had been right about the value of men experienced in Chevez's trickery. There was nobody going out who could tell Chevez's tactics from any other bandit's.

Bingham wondered if he could argue the captain into taking Wheeler, after all, or taking Claflin or even himself, maybe. Some of them had actually seen Chevez and knew what he looked ilke. Let's see—

Bingham snapped his fingers in sudden elation. He himself was the only one in the garrison who had ever caught a glimpse of Chevez in the contacts they had had. Tatro and Ross were in San Albino. Kirby was captured. Here was a point that might make an impression. The big lieutenant strode rapidly down the column.

HE MET the captain in the gap between the advance guard and the main body of the patrol.

"I was just thinking, sir, about this Ignacio Chevez."

The captain reined in his horse.

"Yes?"

"You know the way the bandits ditch their arms sometimes, and pretend to be farmers. My wound feels fine and I could help you out by identifying Chevez if he pulled that trick. I just remembered that I'm the only one here that can positively recognize him."

The captain leaned forward in his saddle.

"Lieutenant, I told you that you'd stay here in command of Quilali, and I meant it. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. Only, since I know this buzzard—"

"I don't care if you know Sandino himself. You'll stay here."

Bingham swallowed and then tried once more:

"But, Captain, besides my knowing the guy there are other reasons. This Chevez is my personal plum. It was one of his gang that nicked me in the arm, and he—"

"Don't argue with me," snapped the captain. "Your reasons are bizarre. You are headstrong and misled. This stirring up of personal animosity, this attempt to foment a campaign of individual reputations is foolhardy and dangerous. You have already taken a patrol ten miles out of its way and committed the unforgivable sin of losing a man without knowing how it happened. Lack of control, I suppose; inefficient planning."

The lieutenant felt his blood pressure rising:

"Planning," he said. "Is any man more important than the success of an attack?"

"The attack was unnecessary. You should have foreseen the consequences; the capture of Kirby and this massing of hundreds of men you've caused."

Bingham stared, and when he found words his voice was edged:

"I should have foreseen? What do you expect me to do? Get together with Chevez and hold a rehearsal in advance? And who says I caused the massing of these hundreds of men? If you'd left me out there on the trail or let me go since, I'd have Kirby back here by now, and I wouldn't need any topheavy army like this to do it. Give me a dozen men—give me six, right now, and I'll show you."

The captain's gray eyes glinted, and his thin lips became thinner.

"Young man, you forget yourself. Re-

member that I—"

Bingham's temper snapped.

"Tripe!" he rasped, stepping closer. "You're damned right I forget myself, and I'll do a good job while I'm at it. I've got a man that's been captured and you're doing your best to kill him. Eight days now you've fiddled around, sending messages and getting the colonel to authorize this big drive. Do you think your plans are a secret to the bandits? Like hell. You've got no Western Front here to keep news from leaking through. Ten minutes after you start they'll know it. Nobody but a prime fathead could expect a plan like yours to work."

Red faced, the captain opened his mouth twice before he managed:

"You can't talk to me like that. Insolent, insubordinate—"

"Disrespectful and mutinous," Bingham finished for him. "But damned true, you poor stuffed fish! Sit down with a map and figure that out. What do you expect to get by handshaking the new colonel into organizing this wild goose chase? Trying to make it look big so you can collect a little prestige?"

"You—you're under arrest."

"Who the hell cares?"

"I'll stand you in front of a court-martial. I've already sent word to the colonel about you."

"I don't give a damn if you've written your Congressman about me."

"You're unfit to be an officer. You're unfit to be left in command." The captain rose in his stirrups and yelled at the head of the main body, fifty yards away. "Doctor Hutchins," he shouted. "I want Doctor Hutchins. One of you men get him and send him here."

"You climb off that horse," Bingham invited in a low voice, "and come out in the bushes for five minutes. I'll fix you so you'll need a dozen doctors."

"You'll regret this," stormed Pressman. "Every word you say will be used against you."

"Yeah? Where's your witnesses? There's not a man near enough to hear clearly."

"I'll report it to the colonel. I'll file a report in detail when I see him in San Juan."

Doctor Hutchins came scurrying up.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, I did. Doctor, Lieutenant Bingham is under arrest. I'm recommending him for a general court-martial and you, therefore, will be in command of this post during my absence."

The doctor looked worried and uncertain.

"I—I'm not a line officer. I'm unfamiliar—"

"You can handle the routine."

"But, if anything happened. If we were attacked, or—"

"That would be an extreme emergency. The lieutenant would automatically resume leadership."

"Or you could write a letter to the colonel, Doctor," Bingham suggested. "Maybe the bandits would delay a few days now they know how slow we are."

LIEUTENANT BINGHAM sat brooding on the porch of what had once been the village *alcalde's* house. There were no natives in Quilali—had been none since the Marines took it over—and the few men the captain had left behind only added to the forlorn and deserted atmosphere of the town. From the hour of the captain's departure, yesterday morning, Bingham had spent most of his time sitting here. He'd been a fool, he reflected, to lose his temper. It meant ruining the name he had begun to carve for himself as a combat officer. He'd worn out lots of shoe leather, outguessed and outfought the bandits, and had gathered something of a reputation. And now, because he had spoken heatedly, it was all thrown away.

A plane appeared and circled overhead. One had come in late yesterday and dropped them news on the progress of the big drive. One would come over every afternoon at the same time, prob-

ably, and drop them more of the same uninteresting information—the locations of the various columns and the appearance of the area they were combing. Combing—bah! How could you cover a wilderness the size of New Jersey by sending a half dozen patrols along designated routes, running them on time schedules, like trains? It looked pretty on the map, certainly, but they forgot that a half inch pencil mark on the map would cover a hiding place for a hundred men on the ground. You could drop five thousand troops into the wrinkled confusion of ridges and valleys and have hard work finding a single squad of them.

Bingham rose lazily and went out to watch the handling of the signal panels. The aviator roared down at the group of five or six who waited for him. A stick, with a message wrapped about it, and a fluttering tail of white cloth, shot downward. A Marine recovered it and brought it to the lieutenant, who looked at the writing listlessly. The captain, he noted, was making good time, had traversed the heights that look down on the Coco River and had stopped last night at the Reyes *finca*. The San Albino column was in Barrillal valley. The Yali outfit—

"Is it important? What does it say?" Doctor Hutchins was at his shoulder.

Bingham laughed and pointed out the last sentence, "An unusual number of natives were seen working in the small fields northwest of Cerro Blanco." The bandits were up to their old tricks, ducking out to pose as farmers when danger approached. The big drive, then, would net nothing. Too well advertised. If there had been less elaborate preparation and a speedier start, or if they had included some kind of follow-up, it might have been different.

"Is that where the captain is? Cerro Blanco?" asked the doctor.

"No. That's where Ignacio Chevez is, I imagine," said Bingham. "All right, Andrews. Lay out the 'message understood' signal."

"Will the captain get Chevez, then, and rescue Kirby?" the doctor wanted to know.

"Hell, no," replied the lieutenant. "How you going to identify a bandit when he's got no gun and red and black hatband? Nobody'll get Chevez this trip. That is, unless—"

He chewed on his lip a moment. The captain would pass through Cerro Blanco some time before sundown and would get to San Juan—ten or twelve miles farther on—a little after dark. If he'd been told about them, he'd investigate these men in the fields and move on, finding no evidence. If it were the Chevez gang—

"Wait a minute, Andrews," said Bingham, abruptly. "Give that pilot the pickup signal instead."

He pulled an old letter from his pocket and began to write hurriedly on the back of the used envelop.

The doctor asked:

"What are you doing? Am I supposed to do something?"

"Yeah," said Bingham, "hold your breath."

The men rigged the pickup apparatus—two poles with a nail, point outward, at the end of each—over which they hung a long loop of cord with the message attached, so that, when the poles were raised, the cord formed a wide, inverted triangle, the message dangling at the bottom. The observer, in the plane's after-cockpit, paid out a long line weighted with a lead "fish" which swished through the center of the triangle as the plane swept past and snatched cord and message from the poles.

"What is it?" insisted the doctor nervously. "Shouldn't I know? I'm in command."

"I'm just asking about the latest styles in men's shirts," Bingham said.

The aviator tipped his wing, circled, and dived to drop his answer.

"Yes," read the erratic pencil scratchings. "Since you mention it, I remember noticing it—the exact shape of a

Navy epaulette. Detailed location of field is—"

"Claflin," yelled Bingham excitedly, "round up every man here. Give that plane the O. K, Andrews. Doc, it's Chevez's gang in those Cerro Blanco fields. The guy that shot me in the arm had a black patch on the shoulder of his shirt that any Marine or sailor could identify a mile away."

"But how—but what—but, the captain—"

"To hell with him. Get your belt and gat, Doc. We're taking off."

"Wh—what?"

"We're going after Chevez—everybody in camp. Catch him flatfooted."

The doctor scurried at Bingham's heels as the big man strode toward the men's quarters.

"After Chevez? You can't. The camp—"

"We'll abandon it."

"But I—I can't permit it. I'm in command."

"Stay here, then, and sing commands to yourself. I'm taking the men."

"I forbid it. You're still under arrest. You've got no authority."

Bingham halted.

"Look here, Doc. I'm taking the men. And I'm either going to get Kirby or kill Chevez. Is that plain?"

"But some of the men can't go. Sick men. Corporal Henderson and—"

"What's the matter with Henderson?"

"Teeth," said the doctor. "He's got a violent toothache."

Bingham laughed.

"It can ache on the trail as well as it can here."

"Some have infected insect bites—"

"Paint 'em with iodine."

"One man can't walk."

"We've still got a couple of mules for them."

"But I'm the one in command. The captain put me in charge."

"Aw, tune off," said Bingham. "This chance is what I call an extreme emergency, Doctor, so I'm taking over. Go put on some leggings."

THE camp became a scene of feverish activity. They worked eagerly, as men will at an unsanctioned task; but in spite of their industry it was well after dark when the straggling, limping column of eighteen men—the physically unfit, the unwanted, the culls, and the offenders against discipline—crept out of Quilali along the stream bed that led westward. They had stripped their quarters as thoroughly as possible; had hidden supplies and property, the excess ammunition, the field radio and a too heavy Browning machine gun. They left an airplane panel laid out to inform flyers that a Marine patrol had gone up the valley.

Bingham figured that he could reach Cerro Blanco soon after dawn. The captain had taken the best part of two days to get that far but he had followed the roundabout mountain route miles to the south and then swung at right angles. The captain's cumbersome, fifty-man patrol ought to be getting into San Juan about now and, with the other columns of the big concentration, should spend a day or so talking things over and telling their troubles to the new colonel before they started back.

Bingham laughed softly to himself as he stumbled along. Eighteen cripples, led by a wounded man who was under arrest, kidnaping the officer left in charge of a post, abandoning the post, and seeking contact without orders. Technically they could try him for murder if he killed any bandits. Well, let them. This was the swan song, anyhow, and he might as well make one desperate attempt to rescue Kirby before he hung up his sword.

The moon came out later, and gave them occasional glimpses, through the foliage, of the high walls of the valley. The going became easier underfoot and the treetrunks were less vague and ghostly. The stream became smaller; at dawn it waned to a mere trickle, and when the slanting rays of the sun took the last trace of the night's clammy chill

from the air, they came out on the Cerro Blanco trail, not far from the little settlement itself.

They stamped the mud from their feet, loosened clothing and dug with busy fingernails for the tiny ticks that had burrowed into their skins. The doctor was still grumbling to himself. Corporal Henderson's jaw bulged like a miniature balloon. The insect bitten individuals were pimpled with a new set of bites. The man who couldn't walk complained that the pressure of the stirrups against his feet was killing him. A youngster with stomach trouble looked dangerously weak and pale. Bingham shrugged, rubbed his sore arm gently and stooped to examine the ground.

He found plenty of footprints and hoofmarks, found a few sodden crumbs of hard bread, an empty sardine can and the butt of an American cigaret.

"Some one," he observed, "was sneaking a smoke on the captain. They passed through, all right, late yesterday. Now, we've got to keep our eyes peeled."

"Better let me go first, Lieutenant," Claflin suggested. "That pistol won't do you much good unless you can shoot left handed."

"I guess I can manage a couple of shots. We'll pussyfoot up close to Cerro Blanco, and if nobody's there we'll angle uphill and ease over the ridge into those fields the aviator saw."

They moved slowly, carefully, till the distance-dulled *whang* of a rifle shot halted them. Claflin broke the expectant silence that followed.

"The captain's column?" he asked. "Accidental discharge?"

"Hell, no," said Bingham. "That shot was less than a mile ahead of us. The captain's still in San Juan—unless he got ambitious and headed back this morning. It's probably nothing but a—"

A burst of half a dozen more shots echoed from the same indefinite direction and settled to an irregular succession of ominous reverberations. Bingham loosened his pistol in its holster and gave brisk commands.

"Let's go. Keep that mule well to the rear. Move fast, now, but don't get careless."

They wound swiftly along the narrow trail.

"D'you think it's Marines, Lieutenant?"

"I don't know. No—you'd hear a Thompson or an automatic if it was."

"Gee, it's stopped," said Claflin, "just as sudden as it began."

They traveled another half mile before Bingham slowed them down.

"Cerro Blanco," he said. "It's below us and beyond that heavy thicket. But there's a deep ditch runs this side of it that we can't cross without being seen."

"I think I hear voices," Claflin whispered.

"Right."

"But there don't seem to be any commotion. Must have been shooting at a deer, or something."

"No native would waste that many shots. There's something funny going on. We'll have to climb up through the bush and sneak down on the compound from above."

"How about Scanlon, the man with the sore feet?" Claflin asked.

"He can crawl, can't he? Stake the mule somewhere out of sight."

They wormed their way upward, through tangled vines and thorn bristling brush. It took a long time. They changed direction and began to creep along, instead of up, the hillside. Presently a loud *"Ole"* came up to them from the compound and they flattened to the ground, wondering how they could be seen when the vegetation was so thick that objects ten yards away were invisible. Then the cry was answered by a shout from the crest of the ridge above them and they knew that they were still undiscovered.

"We're between two gangs of 'em," Claflin whispered. "Shall we split, and half of us take each bunch?"

"Shut up," replied Bingham. "Listen."

The man in the compound shouted that everything was ready, and several voices on the ridgetop yelled that a tree was in the way. There were more words, the babble of men in argument, and the sound of ringing blows as somebody began hacking vigorously at a tree with his machete.

"About fifteen or twenty in each group," Bingham told his sergeant cautiously. "We'd better scout out the high ground first. I don't know who they are or what they're up to, but it'll be wise if we park our worst cripples right here."

HE GATHERED his three most serious cases: Scanlon, and the man with stomach trouble and one other, and put the doctor in charge of them.

"And for God's sake, Doc," he directed, "don't shoot. Don't do a thing. Don't even breathe, unless you have to. Just sit. We'll be back for you later."

With his remaining men Bingham crept toward the ridgetop, alert and hopeful. If this were Chevez's gang—

The chopping in the compound ceased and a tree crashed to earth. A voice called to the party above them, and the words were like music to the big lieutenant—

"Ya esta bueno, Don Ignacio?"

"Creo," came the answer.

Bingham waved his men upward, his heart pounding in exultation. It *was* Chevez's gang, and Chevez himself was there, on the ridgetop, almost within reach. If he could get close enough and perhaps locate Kirby, Chevez would experience some shooting he hadn't expected.

They struck the top of the ridge a safe distance on the bandits' flank and edged along toward the sound of voices. The sun was uncomfortably hot. Flies buzzed. A blue butterfly careened aimlessly past. The foliage thinned a little and Bingham saw the faded yellow shirt of a bandit for a moment as the fellow moved about, scarcely a hundred yards away.

"Look out," warned Claflin. "Something's happened."

There was a flurry of excitement among the bandits on the ridge. The Marines heard hurried, broken sentences, too indistinct to be translated. They heard rifle bolts click, and heard the light, metallic sound of loose ammunition as men handled cartridges. Bingham was apprehensive. He hadn't located Kirby yet. He rose carefully, craning his neck for a better view. Claflin rose, too, hissed suddenly, and pointed down the hillside in a gesture of horrified discovery.

Bingham's eyes followed the sergeant's finger, and his breath caught in his throat. From up here he could see the little compound, four hundred yards from them at the foot of the steep hillside, with the trail winding on beyond it to bend and dip and disappear in a coffee grove. There was no sign now of the outlaws that had shouted up to Chevez. The clearing was vacant except for a single figure; a figure in Marine khaki, spreadeagled on the ground in the exact center of the open space.

"It's Kirby," whispered Claflin. "Staked out on an anthill. Let's go."

An oath ripped through Bingham's teeth. He gripped the eager sergeant's arm and held him where he was. He wanted to think. Hope, despair, contradictory possibilities and wild absurdities flashed through his mind. He fought down the frenzied impulse to leap immediately into action. Facts must be considered, and decisions weighed.

"No anthill there," he muttered. "Don't remember any. Something funny about this. Few minutes more won't hurt Kirby—"

"For the love of Pete," said the sergeant, "let's do something. They'll shoot him from up here. That's what they're up here for—to shoot him in case he gets loose."

"Some up here—some down there.

They could shoot him easier from below."

A half formed plan was in the lieutenant's mind, but it didn't satisfy him completely. A minute ago there had been a handful, at least, of bandits in the compound. They must still be near it. Chevez, with a dozen or two more was here on the ridgetop with a clear field of fire, now that the obstructing tree was chopped down. A ticklish situation, with no clear cut solution. Bingham could divide his patrol and have part of them tackle Chevez on the hilltop while the rest rushed in to rescue the staked out figure below. The chances against success were dangerously high, but some kind of action was imperative.

"Claflin," he said, "you take—"

"My God! Look!" groaned Claflin in sudden dismay.

He was staring, not at the compound below them, but up the valley to the west of it, where the trail that led to San Juan dipped into the coffee grove.

The lieutenant stared too, and the pit of his stomach tightened into a hard knot. Out of the coffee grove, grimly and steadily, came one Marine after another, heading silently toward the thatched houses that surrounded the compound.

"Pressman's column!" gasped Bingham.

Commands, plans of movement, the things he must do, sped automatically through his mind, but his emotions sank in utter despair. The bandits had seen the column, too, and were waiting, ready to fire. If Pressman's men rushed in—as they would—to effect the rescue in the compound, Chevez would open up. If Bingham rushed Chevez, the outlaw nevertheless would have the slight moment needed to wing a few shots downward at the target he had staked out and at Pressman's advance guard. It was a trap, a well planned trap, laid out over a measured range.

That was what those shots had been —Chevez shooting at the spot now covered by that khaki uniform. The next few frenzied minutes, Bingham knew, would be fatal to all his hopes, no matter what the outcome. With Kirby rescued, Pressman would take the credit. If Kirby, or any one else, were killed, the big lieutenant knew that the blame would fall on him.

"Damn Pressman," he said fiercely. "His lousy, stinking, trouble snooping luck has got me this time. Claflin—" he slipped his pistol from its holster and clicked off the safety lock— "move the men after me—on the run. Sweep the ridge—take it out on Chevez—"

He gripped the wrist of his wounded arm in his left hand, took two long strides, and broke into an easy trot, crouching as he zigzagged through the bushes.

THE underbrush on the bandits' ridgetop position was thick enough to make any action a touch-and-go matter. Bingham's seasoned Marines gaged their gait by their leader's, ready for a final burst of speed. They covered half the distance. Bingham could see two, three, five outlaws partially visible, their rifles aimed down at the compound. It was a matter of seconds before they'd hear him. He prayed for a glimpse of Chevez, for an indication of how long their line was, for a chance to distract them all, instead of just the nearest few, before they opened fire.

But, as he leaped from his trot into a desperate sprint, one rifle spoke, and the roar of a half dozen others blotted the sound of the echo.

"Kirby's death warrant," thought Bingham, with a pang, and urged his legs to greater speed.

He heard a bullet crack at his ear as one of his own men fired past him. Two startled bandit faces flashed toward him and rifle muzzles swung. Bingham's pistol spat from waist height. The first native collapsed. The second one dropped his weapon and dived headfirst down the hillside.

The whole outlaw line, surprised and terror stricken at this unexpected menace, ceased pouring punishment into Pressman's advance guard and jerked erratic shots at the charging Marines. Bingham felt a bullet pass through his shirt. He slammed a new clip into his pistol. Claflin's Thompson gun coughed twenty hot slugs from its muzzle in a single burr of vicious sound.

Blue, black and white shirts popped into view and disappeared again just as suddenly, scuttling for cover like frightened rabbits. There was no doubt of the outcome after the first half minute, but Bingham wanted more than the mere winning of a skirmish.

"After 'em," he shouted. "Run 'em down. Wipe 'em out. Make 'em pay for Kirby."

His men scattered to dash after fleeing shapes that dodged away through trees and brush, that plunged, in their panic, down the hillside directly toward Pressman's bewildered patrol as readily as in any other direction. Bingham glimpsed a red and black hatband, knew by the sound and by the shaking verdure that more than one was crashing through the thickets here, and he leaped after them. Low branches thrust themselves against his chest, brambles tore at his clothes. He heard one of his quarry stumble and fall, caught fleeting sight of wide shoulders in a gray shirt, and redoubled his efforts. The man looked like Chevez himself.

They scrambled downward. A hundred yards farther Bingham got a closer, clearer view of the man and all doubt vanished. It *was* Chevez. Bingham forgot the others—could no longer see or hear them anyhow. He felt for the third clip of pistol ammunition, his last one, and failed to find it. Must have dropped it back there. No matter. There were still two rounds left in his pistol. Chevez was headed right toward the compound, was already halfway there, and, Bingham decided grimly, when he tried to turn aside he'd be a gone goose.

It was a fallen tree that finally trapped Chevez, an impenetrable barrier of bristling foliage. He whirled, snarling, and whipped out his pearl handled revolver. Bingham charged desperately on. The tangled obstructions impeded him with exasperating tenacity, like the power that weighs on frantic feet in a nightmare. Flame leaped at him from the outlaw's revolver, but he lumbered on. There were only two rounds in his pistol, and one of them had to find its target.

At fifteen paces he raised his weapon, took deliberate aim, heedless of the lead that sang past his ears, and fired. Chevez's frame lurched from the impact but, instead of falling, the man snatched at his belt for more cartridges to feed into his empty revolver. Bingham lunged five yards nearer to fire his last shot. There was something peculiar about his pistol. He realized that it was empty, that the slide was back, ready for reloading. There had been only one round in it instead of two! It was too late to take cover or turn back. The lieutenant hurled his useless pistol at the bandit's head. White hot needles of pain stabbed through his injured arm and the missile went wild.

But there was no need of his shouting— "Damn you, I'll get you anyhow," and closing in to grapple with the outlaw.

Chevez's revolver barrel wavered, the burning fierceness of his eyes ebbed to blank cloudiness, his knees sagged, and he collapsed in a twisted heap with the suddenness of a pricked balloon. Bingham's first shot had demanded its toll.

The big lieutenant stood over his victim, sucking great gulps of warm air into his straining lungs. Here, he felt, was a drop of satisfaction that would soften the bitterness of the punishment that was yet to come. He had gotten Chevez.

"Lieutenant, was that you yelling? Bingham—Lieutenant—where are you?" A nervous, excited voice reached his ears from a spot farther downhill.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"Hutchins," came the reply. "Quick, quick. There's a bandit in the bushes up near you."

Bingham flattened to the ground. He had forgotten the other bandits, had forgotten Doc Hutchins and the three sick men, too, and marveled that he had chased Chevez so close to their hiding place.

"He's been there since we got here," the doctor called timidly. "He's spying on us."

The lieutenant ground his teeth and craned his neck for a glimpse of the enemy.

"Shoot him," he rasped. "For God's sake, why didn't you shoot him before?"

"You told me not to shoot," quavered the doctor from his clump of bushes. "I can't see him now. But he's been there for hours."

Hours! Bingham snorted at the elasticity of the doctor's imagination. Then his breath caught as a fantastic possibility blinked through his mind. A bandit in the same place, within sight of four Americans, oblivious to all that had taken place?

HE RAISED himself to a crouching position, circled the fallen tree, cautiously, and saw, not thirty feet away, the red and black hatband of an outlaw. The man was struggling with something —wriggling in half exhausted efforts. Bingham crept closer, then jumped to his feet and ran. The man was white, dressed in bandit uniform, and he was securely gagged and tied to a small tree. Kirby! The figure down in the compound must have been a dummy, dressed in the captive's clothes!

"The buzzards were going to trap you, Lieutenant," Kirby said, weakly, as Bingham worked at his bonds. "Thought they'd nick you near that dummy. Then the dirty cutthroats were going to stick me out in plain sight, dressed like this, so when the gang shot back I'd be killed by my own buddies. You got here just before they were ready for you, though they figured you'd arrive before the big column came back through from San Juan."

"Yeah," grunted Bingham.

He was thinking, wondering what Pressman would say now. Chevez was dead and Kirby was safe, but—how much damage had the outlaws inflicted on Pressman's advance guard?

The doctor came up to take a look at Kirby. Claflin's voice, on the ridgetop, was reassembling the patrol. A thin line of tense Marines from Pressman's column broke through the thickets from below, and behind them came Pressman himself and another officer, a leather faced, authoritative figure with a colonel's eagles on the collar of his shirt.

"I knew it was he," Pressman panted triumphantly, and glared at Bingham. "By God, Bingham, you'll suffer for this. Three of my men shot, one of them seriously, and you out here without orders when you're under arrest. It's mutiny, abandoning your post, maltreatment of—"

The doctor glanced up, beaming benignly, with his hand on his patient's shoulder, and said one word—

"Kirby."

The colonel strode forward. Pressman gasped—

"God bless my soul," in a hoarse whisper tinged with sudden self-doubt.

"Chevez is dead, too," chirruped the doctor. "Bingham shot him."

Bingham stood waiting. The colonel looked him up and down with a quizzical expression in his alert, interested eyes.

"So you're Bingham, eh?"

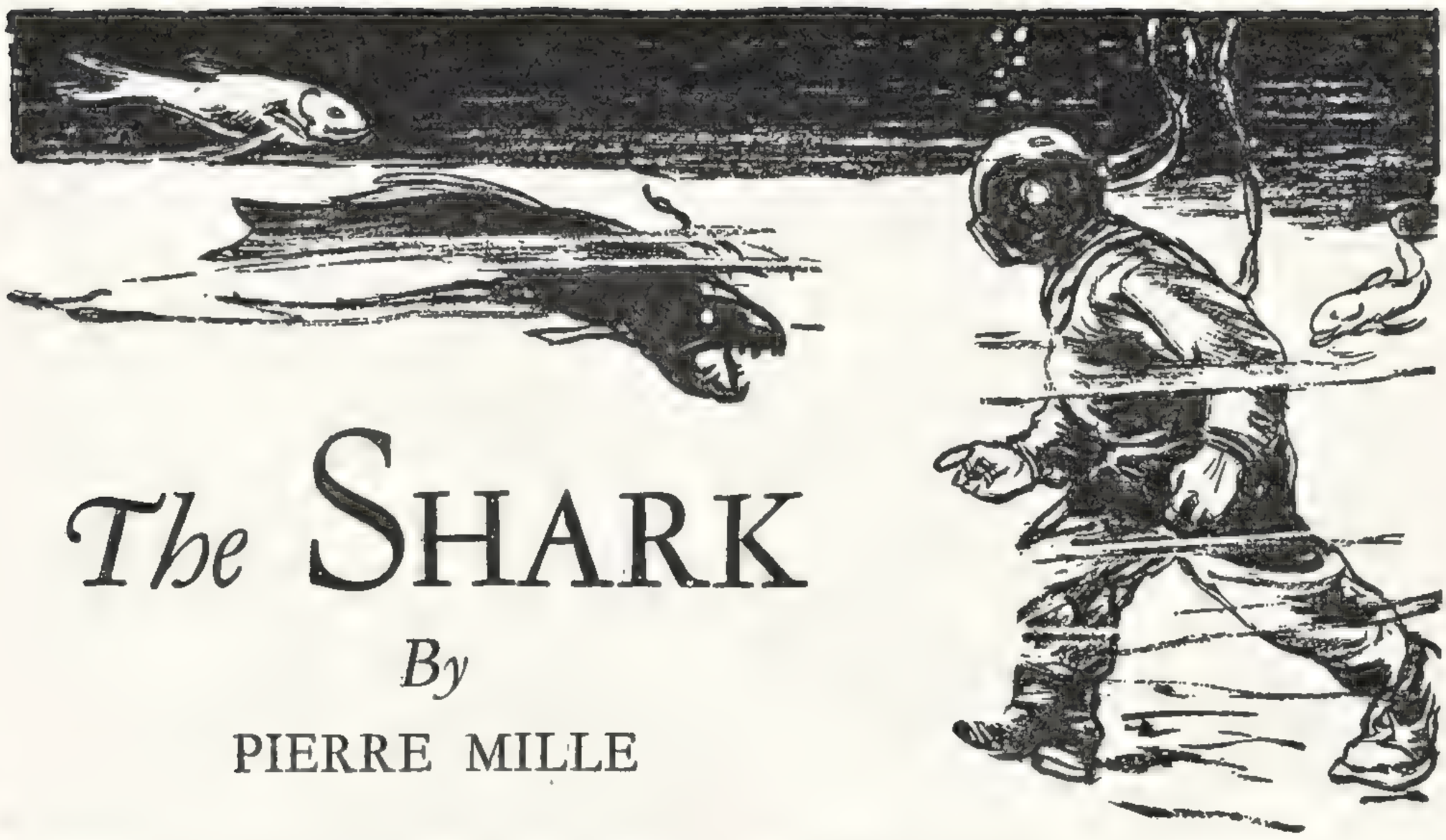
"Yes, sir."

"Got anything to say?"

"Well, sir—" Bingham swallowed—"I abandoned Quilali, and I took sick men out without orders, and—"

"Oh, to hell with that," said the colonel. "I told you," he went on, turning to Pressman, "that the principle of surprise is as vital in these bandit contacts as the principle of the offensive. It's the element of surprise that wins; that and a little initiative."

Bingham, reading the emotions that struggled for control in Pressman's face, began to grin.



The SHARK

By

PIERRE MILLE

FOR the tenth time that afternoon, at least, my friend Samuel Bôze was washing his hands. It is a mania with him: one might believe that he is not a Jew but a Moslem, ordered by his religion to ritual ablutions. And that is what I told him laughingly as, in the washroom of the restaurant, he rolled up his cuffs once again, took the showy rings from his fingers and piously scrubbed his hands up to his hairy forearms.

He shrugged, selected a table, and spoke only after ordering oyster cocktails with red pepper as an appetizer.

"One is never clean enough! It is impossible to wash often enough to bear no odor, the smells of all the things touched: the leather of cushions in carriages, the wood of pencils, even this spoon scrubbed with polish, possess a smell. And that is bad; that is very bad! I learned that during my travels."

Six or eight months of the year, Samuel moves around the world, from the Persian Gulf to the South Seas, to Venezuela, to purchase pearls; then he comes back to Europe to sell them. It is a good business, and one in which there is adventure.

I learned that [Samuel said] on the reefs of the Great Barrier, near the Frankland Islands, in Australia. You know that it is there that pearl oyster banks are found, thirty to forty meters below the surface, all along that long line of coral. It is too deep to send divers as in the Persian Gulf. A schooner is sent to the reefs, and the fishing is done by a man in a diving suit. It is hard work. Four or five hours on the submarine soil, crushed by pressure, poisoned by carbonic acid manufactured by one's own lungs. The Australians want none of it, and although they don't like the Japanese, it is almost always little Japs they take as divers.

There were two on the schooner on which I traveled, working in relays from morning until night. The first, a dry old chap, polite, not talkative, came back on one occasion somewhat sooner than expected. The other was his brother, much younger. When the first diver set foot on the deck, he was fishing; had been cleaning the fish he had caught on his line. The helmet was unscrewed from the old man's head, he was stripped of the suit, of the metal and leather jacket, of the waterproof clothing to which were attached boots with soles of lead.

"Get going," snapped the captain, indicating the suit to the brother.

The little Jap knew that white men were always nervous and hasty. Time is money, particularly when a minute may mean a pearl worth two to three thousand pounds sterling. The little Jap wiped his hands on his canvas pants, and was about to wash them in a bucket, for he was of a very clean race.

"Get going!" the captain repeated.

Then he allowed himself to be encased in that sort of machine, the helmet was screwed securely, and he went down.

He had not been scratching the corals for ten minutes with his flat, double edged knife, when he saw a great, gray shadow whirling over his head, grow larger, become precise: a large shark—a very large shark. That astonished him greatly, and seemed unusual. Sharks of all countries have different ways. Those of that region are known to leave man alone: the sea offers many fish, is filled with easy prey, easier to catch than that large, monkey-like creature who struggles, makes a disturbance, hits out with a sharp object held in his hand.

The little Jap thought the presence of the shark was accidental. Doubtless the shark was not seeking him: there must be a fish or carrion about. He looked, searched, saw nothing! And the shark stopped over his head, started to turn to place his three rows of teeth on a level with the man. The little Jap dug into the bottom to create a cloud, waved his hands. The shark retreated, went up a few meters, then waited as if hovering.

"He'll get stubborn," the Jap thought, "and stick it. He has picked me for today's meal. Doubtless, he is not a shark like other sharks. It is best to go up."

He pulled the signal rope. But in the code of signals, no way existed to explain the cause of his worry. He could only say—

"Pull me up!"

On deck, they were surprized, but they obeyed. They started to hoist him, but very slowly. Very slowly, as is proper, stopping for several minutes every fathom or so: for the decompression must not take place too quickly and it is wiser to give the carbonic acid time to dissolve in the water. Without such precautions, the diver would be dead when brought on deck.

The huge, ferocious fish appeared to understand. Its prey was afraid, wanted to flee. This encouraged it. With a flip of the tail, it dived, went a bit too low, then, turning, slid upward with its belly against the fisherman's stomach, head to head. The Jap kicked it with his leaden soles, stabbed with his knife at the same time. But the blade, rounded at the tip, slipped on the rough skin. Nevertheless, the shark went away; it was always the same thing: men had disconcerting, peculiar ways.

One hour! It took one hour to bring the diver to the surface. And the attack was renewed several times. The Jap, despite his calm, started to quiver inside his suit. The shark was angry. Now, it tried something new. He tried to daze the man by hitting him with his tail. But the helmet was solid, and at last the diver appeared above the water.

Unfortunately, the ladder was not there. The boat had swung before the wind. The crew hoisted the helpless diver around to take him to the ladder. But as his helmet was out of the water, the Jap could not see what went on below.

"Where is it; what is it doing, that shark?" he wondered.

It was not far away. The Jap felt the grinding of its sharp teeth along his leg. With the free limb, he kicked out, and the teeth slipped, a few penetrating the leather, the others hooked in the lead sole. The hoisters felt the weight they were hauling increase beyond reason, and then saw the shark clinging to the diver.

Some one ran for a rifle, opened fire. The fish, perhaps wounded, dived. Men are unbearable! When dealing with them, things beyond understanding always happen. And the Jap reached the ladder, climbed it. His helmet was lifted

off, and all saw his drawn face, the chattering teeth through gasping lips.

"I was attacked by a shark," he said. "That isn't natural. No, it isn't normal! What started it?"

The old man, his brother, shrugged his shoulders, pointed to the fish left piled in a bucket and said—

"You hadn't washed your hands!"

* * *

"Don't you understand?" Samuel insisted at this, the conclusion of his story. "The little Jap had not washed his hands before getting into the suit. Therefore, he had on him the smell of blood and fish. That was what had attracted the shark."

We had lighted cigars. Samuel Bôze, after paying the check, went toward the washroom.

First Voyage

By BILL ADAMS

I KNOW not whether you burned it out, or used a flint to carve it;
Whether you felled a tree, or found one down, or how you managed to halve it;
How you managed to split its trunk in twain, and with flint, or smoldering fire
You gouged it out and built the canoe that suited your odd desire.
I doubt not the tribesmen gathered round, with scornful mocking lips,
And, grinning, watched to see you drown when you launched your mother of ships.
I know that you sensed a freedom new as you paddled her slow away
From the long green waving reeds that grew by the shore of your tidal bay;
(I know that his gaze was far away on the water's distant brim,
And I would that I had been there that day to make that voyage with him.)
I think that when you returned that night to take your place by the fire
There were naked maids with eyes alight, and you were their desire;
I know as you watched the dry twigs burn that a dream was in your brain,
That you longed for the daylight's slow return, that you might voyage again.
Oh, naked savage with beetling brow, long eons have passed since then,
But whenever a ship with curving prow and crew of sailormen
Goes forth to brave the watery main, glides seaward from her pier,
Your flesh and blood go forth again, and yours our echoed cheer!

A Story of British South Africa

REBELLION

By L. PATRICK GREENE

TOM HERVEY looked scornfully at his gray haired cousin.

"Nothing like that for me, Henry," he said positively. "I'm getting from Africa just what I want to get from it. I make a good living and I'm my own boss. That's more than you can say, for all your high sounding title of Chief Native Commissioner of the Matopos District of Southern Rhodesia—or however you style yourself."

The two men were seated on the *stoep* of the store building which crested a steep rise of land close to the *kraal* of Tomasi, the headman of the district. The undulating veld stretched out before them as far as eye could see. The lush, sweet grass which carpeted it rippled before the passing of a gentle breeze. The hills which marked the horizon were distance blued and, viewed through the heat haze, strangely distorted. Here and there columns of smoke rose up from the veld, marking the location of a *kraal*. The air was full of sweet scents and peaceful sounds: the smell of *mapani* and *verbena;* the songs of carefree natives, the lowing of cattle and the somnolent drone of bees.

The cousins were silent for a little while, enjoying the atmosphere of peaceful well being which is one phase of Africa. In appearance they were like enough, save for the difference of age, to be taken for twins. Tom Hervey's overlarge beak of a nose was a duplicate of his cousin's. Both had large, outstanding ears, a wide, generous mouth and gray eyes that had more than a hint of steel in them. Both men

were tall and loose limbed, stooping slightly at the shoulders. Both had been tried and seasoned by Africa.

Henry Hervey pulled thoughtfully at the lobe of his left ear.

"And that's your last word, Tom?" he said quietly.

"Absolutely." There was just a suspicion of defiance in the younger man's voice—defiance and apology. "I made my decision eight years ago when I first came out from home and I can see no reason why I should go back on it. I'm satisfied—more than satisfied."

"And don't you think I get what I want from Africa, Tom?" the other asked quietly.

Tom Hervey laughed again.

"You want precious little if you do. A compound manager draws a better salary than you do. You work like a slave—and get little for it. Some politician's pet gets all the credit for everything you do that turns out well. And when things go wrong, why some little squirt of a pen pusher in an office in London, who'd die if he had to do a tenth of the things you accept as part of a day's routine, writes demanding an explanation—and you have to supply it. Why—"

"There's more to the service than pay, or appreciation by one's superiors," Henry Hervey interrupted gravely. "The service—"

"Oh, I know all about that," the other exclaimed impatiently. "Didn't the family drum it into me? Don't they slang me in every letter they write—not that I get many from them nowadays. They've about washed their hands of me."

"You must admit," Henry Hervey said equably, "that the family is somewhat justified. It is the Hervey tradition—"

"Hell! I know all about that, too. Wasn't I brought up on it? It was my grace before and after food."

There was a mocking smile on his face as he sang two of the doggerel verses which another Hervey had written and labeled the family lullaby.

"Rock-a-by, Hervey. Soon you will be
Dealing out justice to nigs oversea.
Hush-a-by, Hervey. Bite on the bit!
Quinine will kill fever and salts keep you fit.

"Chew-a-way, Hervey. Bite your big toe!
You'll be on short rations wherever you go.
Sleep-a-by, Hervey. When you're a man,
And the tom-toms are beating—sleep then, if you can!"

There was another short silence, then Tom Hervey continued:

"And if you like, Cousin Henry, I can recite the Hervey treatment for malaria and the Hervey code of 'things which are not done'! But what of it? To hell with the family tradition. What's it done for the family? Nothing—except a lot of empty honors, nasty deaths and starvation pensions for those unlucky enough to have lived to the age for retirement.

"Why, I've only been trading in this district a little over four years and I'm already worth—counting my stock in trade, cattle and so forth—more than you make in ten years."

"I don't doubt it, Tom," the older man said gravely. "You won't admit it, of course, but a lot of your success is due to your Hervey blood and training. You've got a flair for handling natives—all the Herveys have."

Tom Hervey chuckled.

"At any rate," he said, "I'm the first Hervey to make money out of it."

Henry Hervey ignored that.

"You mustn't blame the family for feeling that you've let them down. And you have, you know. Herveys have always entered the service. A Hervey helped to settle Virginia. There are Herveys in India, China, Borneo. Your father and your father's father served in Africa. It is only natural that the family looked to you to follow in their shoes. Instead of which—" he shrugged his shoulders.

"Go on," Tom Hervey prompted.

Henry Hervey smiled bleakly.

"I was going to say that instead of administering the law you have often come dangerously near to breaking it. You have been a transport rider, a big game hunter—without a license—a prospector, also without a license, a labor recruiter

and an ivory poacher. Incidentally, that poaching trip of yours up the Congo very nearly upset diplomatic relations. They got very hot under the collar about the depredations of a British subject. They insisted on an official apology. And, let me tell you, young man, it was a good job for you that you had a relation in the service you affect to despise. Otherwise, I am afraid you would have been handed over to the Congo people for punishment."

Tom Hervey laughed.

"You don't expect me to swallow that, Henry, do you? The Herveys have never hesitated about sacrificing their white sheep for the good of the service, so I'm damned sure they'd not have moved a finger to save my skin. And did the Congo crowd get their apology? They did? Hell! An expeditionary force ought to have been sent up there to clean them out of the country. The way they treat their natives—"

HE STOPPED abruptly and reddened at his cousin's quizzical look.

"That's the proper Hervey reaction," the older man said complacently. "It's a pity you're only a trader."

"A damned good trader, let me tell you," Tom Hervey retorted heatedly. "I've got old Tomasi and his people eating out of the hollow of my hand. What's more, I've no competition and no silly, half baked official resident in the district to tell me what I can and can not do. I'm cleaning up big, Henry."

"Cleaning up in more ways than one, I hear," Henry Hervey observed dryly. "Tomasi tells me you have objected to certain tribal customs, and put a stop to them—such as killing twins at birth, and the boiling water test and a few other pleasing diversions."

"Tomasi is an old gas bag," Tom Hervey growled.

"It's a pity," Henry continued, "that you are only a trader. It's a pity a trader can't stick to his trading and refrain from interfering with a people's traditions.

"Oh, well, you will be relieved of that responsibility in the future. I'm sending a man up here next month. He'll be your resident magistrate. Save you a lot of bother."

"Make a lot, you mean. Who is he?"

"Blake's his name. Don't know much about him. He's a Colonial. Speaks the language fluently and is reputed to be a good man with natives."

"He'd better be," Tom Hervey said slowly. "Tomasi isn't an easy man to handle and M'Songo, the witch doctor, is a crafty devil." He looked suspiciously at his cousin. "Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that you're appointing a man you know practically nothing about to an admittedly difficult district?"

Henry Hervey sighed.

"It's a political appointment, Tom," he confessed. "I had no say in the matter."

Tom Hervey laughed grimly.

"But won't they give you hell if their appointment falls down on the job?"

A smartly uniformed native orderly, leading Henry Hervey's horse, came to a halt at the foot of the *stoep* steps.

He saluted and in response to Henry Hervey's questions reported that the other members of Commissioner Hervey's inspection patrol—four pack donkeys and two native police—had already left on the long trek back to his headquarters camp.

Henry Hervey rose to his feet.

"Well, goodby, Cousin Tom," he said. "Suppose I'll see you again some day. Give Blake a helping hand."

He went slowly down the steps and swung cleanly into the saddle.

"Sure you won't change your mind?" he said casually as he gathered up the reins. "It'd please the family no end."

"Quite sure," Tom Hervey said curtly. "I know when I'm well off."

Henry Hervey pulled at the lobe of his left ear.

"Some day, Tom," he said, "I shall send for you and offer you a job. I shall work you hard and pay you just enough to keep body and soul together. Yes—some day I shall send for you, and you will come."

He waved his hand in a parting salute and rode away at a slow trot.

Tom Hervey shouted after him derisively:

"Don't waste your time and breath sending for me, Henry. I know when I'm well off. To hell with the service and the family tradition. To—"

And then he grinned sheepishly, conscious that his cousin had ridden out of earshot.

He watched the horseman until a dip in the trail hid him from sight. Then he rose to his feet and stretched himself with a sigh. For the moment he felt unutterably lonely.

II

"MY GOD! Listen to the devils, Hervey! What are we to do?"

Tom Hervey did not answer his companion's question. He was listening to the throbbing beat of tom-toms which pulsated on the still night air. That sound, that monotonous *tum, tum-chi*, was something more than a primitive accompaniment to a savage, ritualistic dance; its rhythm was the beating of a people's heart. It swayed their lives; it dictated their actions. As it spoke, they performed.

The drummers were men of no great importance in the life of the *kraal* people; the drums were only hollowed logs across the top of which skins had been tightly stretched. But the drummers and drums in conjunction produced a voice, and that voice was of the people. It was the people. And now it spoke of hate, of the lust for revenge, of bloodshed.

The *kraal* from which the drums had first spoken was that of the chief's; the one that was built at the foot of the hill crested by Tom Hervey's store. Gradually other *kraals* of the district had taken up the beat until the hill was surrounded by a beating ring of hate.

Wild staccato yells lent emphasis to the *chi* of the drums. Streaks of yellow flame here and there split the darkness, indicating the location of *kraals*—the boiling pots of rebellion which was fomenting in the district. Tom Hervey cursed and, turning fiercely toward his companion, he exclaimed—

"It's all your damned fault, Blake."

"Well—I like that," Native Commissioner Blake said uneasily. "At the risk of my life I've ridden here to warn you that the niggers were out—"

Hervey laughed contemptuously.

"You didn't ride here to warn me, Blake. You came here hoping that I could save your yellow hide. You wouldn't have got here at all except for the fact that the natives knew you couldn't do any harm and that you were under my protection. I told them that."

Blake gasped.

"You mean you knew the rebellion was going to break? And you took no steps—"

Again Hervey's laugh silenced him.

"Of course I knew. It was inevitable from the moment you were appointed native commissioner to the district. I warned you that you were heading for trouble. Well, now you've got it. And you come whining to me, asking me what to do about it. I don't know."

"They trust you, Hervey," Blake said eagerly. "They won't touch you. We'll be safe. We can hold out here until a relief arrives to whip some sense into them . . . Here—" his groping hand closed on Hervey's coat sleeve—"where are you going?"

"To get a light." Hervey broke away from Blake's grip. "I've got work to do—and I don't work in the dark."

The creaking boards of the *stoep*, the slam of a door, marked his passage into the store. When he rejoined Blake again he carried a lighted hurricane lantern.

"What are you going to do?" Blake asked, backing away from Hervey into the dark shadows beyond the range of light.

He was a stoutish man, flabby muscled and flabby minded. His black mustache was waxed and twisted arrogantly upward. It gave him an appearance of autocratic authority. His small eyes were set close together; his nose was bulbous; his lips thick and loose. He was a man

who could be obstinately stubborn up to a point and then yield weakly, a man who alternated gross, overbearing bullying with a sickening display of sychophantic back patting.

"I demand an answer to my question," he said angrily. "You seem to forget that I represent the law."

"And a damned rotten representative you are," Hervey commented. He whistled shrilly.

"Look here, Hervey," Blake continued. "I won't stand for insults from you. You're nothing but a trader. I'm half inclined to believe you're at the bottom of all this trouble. Ever since I came to the district you've been against me—egging the blacks to disregard my authority. By the Lord, you're nothing but a lousy white Kaffir—siding with niggers against your own color."

Hervey was silent, unmoved by Blake's angry indictment. He was listening for sounds which would tell him that his whistled signal was being obeyed.

He heard the sound of voices raised in heated altercation. There followed the sound of blows, muffled curses, a cry of pain and then the pad of naked feet running toward the store.

"Don't be a fool, Hervey! It's only a trap!" Blake shouted as Hervey started down the *stoep* steps.

A WHITE-CLAD native came into the lamplight. He was bleeding from a jagged wound in his forehead. The left sleeve of his tunic coat was marked by a slowly spreading stain of red.

"It is nothing, *inkosi*," he gasped when Hervey would have seen to his hurts. "My head is clearer for a little bloodletting. My arm? *Au-a!* That is nothing. Marka's *assegai* pierced it. That is all. But the *inkosi* called. I am here."

Hervey said slowly:

"My signal called for my horse to be brought to me. I do not see my horse."

The native grinned.

"Those others, *inkosi*, would not permit me to bring the horse. At first they would not permit me to come to you. But I—I reasoned with them."

"A hard reasoning," Hervey commented dryly. "Words that cut and bruise." Then he added, "So I am nothing? The years I have lived in this place mean nothing? Yet there has never been but one meaning to my words. I have always kept to a straight trail. You have called me friend. But now it seems that you require my blood."

"*Inkosi*," the native protested swiftly, "it is not that. Not knowing what was in your mind to do, those others seek only to keep you safe in this place where you are safe. I—as I have said—reasoned with them and they permitted me to come to you."

"But you did not bring my horse," Hervey challenged.

"And will not, *inkosi*. Those others also reasoned with me."

"Well?"

"And, *inkosi*, they led me to see that their way was the wise one. They reminded me of the words of M'Songo—who is the Great Spirit's mouthpiece. 'If,' said M'Songo, giving us the words of the *Umlimo*, 'the storekeeper stays in his own place, no harm can come near him.' And to see that the taboo is kept, even by warriors who may not have heard the words of the witch doctor, men from my father's *kraal* keep guard about the store."

"And so," Hervey said sarcastically, "I must lean on a reed to prop up my lameness. The drums beat loudly at Tomasi's *kraal*."

"What of it, *inkosi?* You would not have them silent when all the people give voice. But the hearts of the people of Tomasi's *kraal* belong to you. They will not suffer harm to come near to you. For five years you have sowed the seeds of justice and understanding among us. The hearts of all the people are in your hands. That is the harvest of your sowing."

"Loud words," Hervey mocked. "And yet you will not allow me to go forth and speak to the people. Why? Do you fear that I would bring the white soldiers to suppress you?"

"My people have no fear of the white soldiers, *inkosi.* The *Umlimo*—through M'Songo he has promised it—will turn aside the bullets from the white men's guns. They can not harm us."

"Then why do you keep me to this place?"

"In the darkness, *inkosi*, an *assegai* might find your heart."

"What if I say I will go my own way? Doing the thing I think right to do?"

"You can not leave this place," Thuso said positively. "The horses have been taken and hidden from you. All about the store are hidden warriors who will bar your way."

"And they would kill me?"

"No, *inkosi.* They would only bring you back to this place—unharmed. Unless—"

"Unless?" Hervey prompted as Thuso hesitated.

"Sometimes, *inkosi*, taboos are forgotten when the blood runs hot."

"I am not a child," Hervey said quietly. "Nor will I suffer myself to be led by the hand along a trail I have no desire to go. I am a man. Look—here I hold a death which I can release on any who dares to stand in my way."

As he spoke he drew his revolver. But, swift though his movements were, Thuso's were swifter. One backward leap took the native beyond the range of the lamp's light. The next moment a shrewdly aimed stone smashed the glass and extinguished the yellow flame.

"Come on up here, Hervey!" Blake shouted excitedly as he opened fire, emptying his revolver into the darkness.

Unseen missiles hurtled through the air; *assegais* stuck quivering in the railing and floor boards of the *stoep;* knobkerries thudded against the side of the store. Yells of hate and defiance threatened to be a prelude to a massed attack upon the two white men.

Thuso's voice—cold, passionless—rose above the tumult.

"*Tula*, fools! Remember the taboo."

In the silence which instantly followed Hervey could hear Blake swearing softly and a noise which told him that that man was reloading his revolver. He rushed up the steps as a sharp click told him that Blake was again ready for action.

"That's right, Hervey." The commissioner laughed hysterically. "Come on! We'll show the black devils what's what!"

He fired as he spoke and yelps of pain told him that his chance shot had found a mark.

BEFORE he could fire again Hervey closed with him, risking everything in one desperate leap. For a little while they struggled desperately, grunting and cursing. Blake was in that condition of panic which puts an end to all reason. He was deaf to expostulations, entreaties or threats.

Hervey's left hand closed about his throat. Hervey's right hand closed about his wrist, wrenching the revolver from his grip. It fell with a noisy clatter to the board floor of the *stoep.* Hervey felt for it with his foot, located it and kicked it away.

"You colossal fool!" he exclaimed.

He pushed Blake away from him. Blake fell backward to the ground. He was content to sprawl there, muttering curses and massaging his bruised throat.

Hervey listened intently. He thought he heard stealthy footsteps creeping toward the *stoep.* There was a sharp, metallic chink. It might have been made by an *assegai* head knocking against a boulder. The air was filled with faint rustlings and whisperings, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.

Hervey licked his lips.

"I would speak to you," he shouted. "We are not acting like men and friends—"

He paused. His words echoed hollowly about him. They did not, he knew, penetrate the wall of darkness which his ill considered action had erected. The drawing of his revolver had been a grave error of judgment. He saw that now. It had disturbed the delicate balance of his relationship with the natives. It had been

the direct cause of Blake's killing panic. If a man had been slain by one of Blake's random shots, Hervey knew that the responsibility was his.

He made no further attempt to appeal to the natives. Anything he might say now would be construed by them as a confession of weakness; or, equally damning to his ultimate purpose—which was to save them from the folly of rebellion—an attempt to deceive.

Before he could do anything with them, he had first to regain their confidence; a confidence which had taken five years to establish; a confidence which had been shaken—if not destroyed—by the action of a second.

He said sharply to Blake—

"Get up—and shut up!"

He heard Blake rise gruntingly to his feet.

"When this *indaba's* over," Blake said heavily, "I intend to report you to the authorities. You're siding with rebellious niggers. You attacked me. You—"

"Don't be a bigger fool than you can help," Hervey interrupted wearily. "You heard the conversation I had just now with Thuso."

"All that talk was a blind," Blake muttered.

"Have it that way if you like. There's no use arguing with a man like you. You're drunk with fear."

Hervey laughed at Blake's futile splutterings of wrath.

"Yes, you are," he insisted. "Else you wouldn't have blazed away like you did."

"I thought they were attacking us."

"They weren't—and they won't. Now, listen. I'm going into the store for another lamp and some grub. We'll have skoff out here on the *stoep*—just as if things were normal. Do you understand?"

"You're mad, Hervey. You can't make things normal—just by saying so. Listen to the tom-toms! Every nigger in the district is out on the warpath. What we've got to do is go into the store and barricade the doors and windows. Hell—" he laughed coarsely—"there's nothing to get windy about. By tomorrow's sun-under there'll be enough men here to teach these fool niggers a lesson."

"You expect a rescue, then?" Hervey said sharply.

"Of course. I sent off a messenger last night."

Hervey swore.

"You play with fire, burn your fingers and yell for help. Damn it, man, don't you understand? It doesn't matter what happens to you or to me. We—

"Oh, to hell with moralizing. There's work to be done. Now we'll get a lamp and some grub."

"I won't eat out here. It's suicide."

"You will," Hervey said bluntly.

"I'm not hungry!" Blake wailed.

"Then you can drink."

Hervey walked with an assured, heavy tread into the store. The screen door slammed noisily behind him.

It sounded like a revolver shot. Blake started nervously as excited, questioning shouts sounded in the darkness about the store.

Thuso—his voice was very calm—answered them.

"It is nothing, warriors. How many times when you have come to trade have you laughed at women who jumped when the door closed upon them with a bang like the white man's fire stick?"

It seemed to Blake that the darkness sighed with relief.

A light appeared in the store. Through the window Blake could see Hervey moving about in a leisurely manner.

"Come and lend a hand," the storekeeper shouted casually.

Blake joined him, cringing as he passed into the glare of the light.

"Carry that out," Hervey said curtly, indicating a small table on which he had arranged food and drink. "I'll bring the light."

Blake started to expostulate, thought better of it and obeyed, Hervey following closely with the lamp.

"Now," he said as he took his place at the table, "pull up a chair and eat. For God's sake, act naturally, man."

He poured out a stiff peg of whisky for Blake; another for himself.

"That's better," he continued as Blake swallowed his drink with a noisy gulp. "Sorry I've nothing better to offer you in the way of grub. Ever had a duiker kid, roasted whole and basted well with butter? It's a dish for a king. My cook boy does it marvelously. Unfortunately, he's engaged elsewhere tonight."

As he spoke he heaped Blake's plate high with an assortment of food and Blake, reassured by his easy manner, forgot his fears and injured dignity and attacked his food with gusto.

TO THE throb of the drums was now added the angry whine of mosquitoes and the drone of swarms of flying insects which, attracted by the light, pestered the two men.

Blake cursed them fluently and loudly. He beat at them, fanning the air with his big, beefy red hands. He helped himself to more food and ate hoggishly. He spaced almost each mouthful with a drink of whisky. His face was flushed; his voice thickened. He laughed loudly at inane trivialities.

Hervey, by comparison, was a cold iceberg. His speech and his actions were as incisive and keen as the edge of a razor.

He nodded approval and encouragement at Blake, who was helping to create the illusion of two men, contentedly eating their evening meal, with no thought beyond the satisfying of their bodily appetites.

A prosaic setting. But the low, distant murmur of the tom-toms, the isolated yells of war hungry natives, the furtive footsteps and whisperings which surrounded the store, invested the prosaic with a touch of the macabre.

"Just the same," Blake said complacently as, his appetite at length satisfied, he leaned back in his chair and lighted a long black cigar, "I don't see what's the idea back of this grandstand play of yours."

"No, I don't suppose you do," Hervey replied, pulling at the lobe of his ear. "I'm trying to regain their confidence. I want to talk with them. But they must make the first move."

"And you think you can win their confidence by sitting out here like this?" Blake sneered.

"Exactly. Lack of confidence springs from fear. You can trace the chain of circumstances yourself if you're of a mind to. When they have got accustomed to us sitting here, weaponless, intending no harm to them and—evidently—not fearing them, their fear will vanish and their confidence return."

"Very touching!" Blake said. "And when you've regained their confidence—what then?"

Hervey laughed.

"Why then, Blake, I'm going to try to put out this fire you've lighted. If I can do what I want to do, there'll be no rebellion to squash by the time the troops arrive on the scene."

"You're mad, Hervey," Blake exclaimed. "There's nothing you can do. You—"

"Control your voice and expression, Blake," Hervey interrupted coldly. "Don't forget we've an audience."

"To hell with them. But do you seriously mean you're going to try to stop this rebellion *indaba?*"

Hervey nodded.

Blake laughed rather hysterically. Deafened by his own laughter, he did not hear the answering chuckles which came out of the darkness. But Hervey did and smiled contentedly.

"And how?" Blake spluttered.

"That," Hervey said, "I don't quite know, yet."

"You're a fool to bother," Blake grunted. "As long as we're safe, why worry about what happens to the niggers?"

He repeated his opinion that the natives of the district deserved to be taught a lesson and that they'd be easier to handle after they'd been severely thrashed and their *kraals* destroyed. His callous, cold blooded anticipation of the misery which would be inflicted on the people following

the smashing of the rebellion by an armed force, aroused Hervey's ire.

"At least," he promised wrathfully, "*you* won't be here to see it, Blake."

"What do you mean?" the other asked uneasily.

"You've preserved your skin by coming here for protection—but I don't imagine you'll be left in charge of this district. You see, I wrote a long report on your gross mismanagement to your superior."

Blake sneered openly.

"Your word—a trader's word—against mine! Don't make me laugh."

"I think," Hervey said slowly, "that your superior will take my word. You see, he happens to be a cousin of mine. And the Herveys do not lie—not even *Trader* Hervey."

Blake stared at him, mouth agape. A look of doubt and indecision came into his furtive eyes.

"I never thought," he muttered, "that you were any way related to that Hervey. But I ought to have guessed. You've got the same big nose—always poking it into another man's business. You—" he fumbled with his pouting lower lip; then with a show of bravado, he said, "What do I care about your reports? This is a notoriously difficult district. The niggers have never been taught a proper lesson. They've got no respect for a white man. I had to be strict. This outbreak was bound to come sooner or later. They'll be easy to handle afterward. And, anyway, I'm not to blame."

"You are," Hervey replied curtly. "I warned you when you first came to the district that you'd have to handle them with kid gloves. But you wouldn't listen. You laughed at me. You told me that the *sjambok* was what they needed. And you saw that they got it. You've been soft when you should have been hard. Your native messengers were bullies—and you supported the things they did. You've flogged headmen in front of their people. The taxes you have forced them to pay has reduced some *kraals* to semi-starvation."

"You mean I've ruined your trading," Blake jeered. "That's what hurts you."

"That's partly true. But that doesn't matter. You went your own way and each fresh act of injustice brought this outbreak a step nearer. You hastened the inevitable when you *sjamboked* M'Songo until he fainted. It was about a woman, wasn't it, Blake? When you set him free again and tried to bribe him—with a mess of sticky sweets and a bottle of gin!—to forgive and forget, you simply threw fat on a blazing fire."

Blake laughed uneasily.

"You're making a mountain out of a molehill, Hervey. This is just a local outbreak. Before another forty-eight hours have passed there won't be a rebel alive in the district. The rest'll all be crawling to me on their bellies, asking for forgiveness."

Hervey looked at him curiously.

"And what will you do?" he asked.

"Do?" Blake laughed. "I'll thrash the skin off their backs." He leaned forward across the table and his eyes blazed. "Listen, Hervey, they made me run for my life. They chased me from my place clear across the veld to here. They hounded me like a wild beast. They killed my native messengers. They've got to pay for that. And I'll see to it that they do pay."

He licked his lips and stared hungrily out into the darkness. And then fear came into his eyes again.

"God!" he exclaimed, clutching at Hervey's wrist. "Look at that! They have fired my place."

AS HE spoke a white glare appeared on the northern horizon. For a moment—a picture of light thrown on the night's black screen—the two men could see the outline of a long bungalow. About it were silhouetted the naked, dancing figures of natives. Their shrill, exultant yells carried clearly over the veld. Almost immediately the straight, sharp outlines of the building were lost in the columns of flame impregnated smoke which poured from windows and doors. And then the

building collapsed, sending fountains of sparks high into the air.

An errant wind scattered them to great distances. Some died before they descended to earth again. But not all. And the dry season was far advanced.

Little rivers of flame began to run about the veld.

The beat of tom-toms sounded with renewed vigor. In the *kraal* at the foot of the hill the natives chanted the song of victory. It was echoed by those who kept guard about the store:

"See there Uzwidi, leading our *impis,*
Gallant and mighty, strong as a mountain.
See Ulunbunya! Strong as a mountain!
Killing the strangers!
Killing the white men!
Haste to the slaughter—kill! Kill!"

The flames of the burning house died down; the chant came to an end. But the rivers of flame hurried about the veld. They were rapidly assuming the size and devastating potentialities of rivers of water at floodtime.

Anxiety enveloped Hervey. Fate had put a weapon in his hand with which to fight the rebellion. But he could not make use of it yet. Despite the need for haste, he was too well versed in the psychology of the natives to attempt to force their confidence. It was for them to make the first move.

He laughed and made some irrelevant reply to Blake's frightened questions. He sang the chorus of a popular song, beating the time with his glass on the table. He laughed again at Blake's expression. He knew that that man thought he had suddenly gone mad.

"*Inkosi?*" Thuso's voice came suddenly from the darkness.

Hervey lighted a cigaret.

"What is it, Thuso?" he asked casually, disguising the elation he felt at a consciousness of victory.

"A little while ago, *inkosi,*" Thuso said, "I acted like a fool. The *inkosi* will pardon?"

"There is no blame, Thuso," Hervey answered. "Fear loosed fear—and fear, mayhap, loosed death. I heard a cry of pain in the darkness."

"There was little harm done, *inkosi.* A bullet scored the flesh of a warrior's belly. That is all."

"Lucky for you, Blake," Hervey said softly to the commissioner.

He rose to his feet and went to the top of the *stoep* steps. The light from the lamp shone full upon him.

"Let this be a token between us," he said. "A token of the trust we bear to each other. Look!"

As he spoke he drew his revolver and threw it from him. For a moment it flashed in the light. Then the darkness swallowed it up. There was a dull thud when it came to ground and a succession of happy, understanding chuckles.

"You fool!" Blake ranted. "You dirty renegade! You've given them a revolver and that's a crime against—"

"Shut up!" Hervey said fiercely, turning on him with a threatening gesture.

At the same moment an *assegai* flashed from out of the darkness into the lamp light. It stuck quivering in the *stoep* rail not a foot from where Blake was sitting.

With a cry of fear Blake jumped from his chair and ran into the store. The door slammed loudly behind him.

"That," Hervey said sternly, silencing the mocking jeers, "was an act of folly. The folly of children dealing with a child. Now take me to the *kraal* of the chief. I must speak with him and with M'Songo, the witch doctor. There is work to be done."

"No," Thuso said flatly. "You must not leave this place. The beat of the tom-toms has wiped out the memory of recent years. If the *inkosi* came among us now, our spears would drink his blood."

"Listen," Hervey said gravely. "I say nothing to you of the revolt you plan against the white man's rule. That is your *indaba,* not mine. Doubtless you know your own strength and are content to measure it against the strength of the white man.

"I say nothing to you of the words of *Umlimo*—given to you by his mouthpiece, M'Songo—except, maybe, that to my

ears those words sound like the fury of an old man who seeks to avenge an insult. I say nothing of your belief that the *Umlimo* will blind the eyes of the white men and turn aside the bullets from their guns. I only bid you remember that a little while ago a warrior was wounded by a bullet. *Au-a!* And that bullet was fired in the night's darkness. Truly, the *Umlimo* must have been asleep or he would have turned aside that bullet!

"*Wo-we!* An end to words. The morrow's sorrow is not yet born. But—mark this well—I tell you that it is now in heavy labor. So, if you will not take me to the *kraal* of the chief, I go there alone."

As he spoke he slowly descended the *stoep* steps, deaf to the entreaties of Thuso who begged him, almost tearfully, not to thrust his body on to the spears of the warriors who waited in the darkness.

As he came to the lowest step four natives—their bodies smeared with ash paint—came forward and barred his way. They held their *assegais* on a level with his chest.

But he did not halt. He went slowly forward. The *assegai* points pierced his clothing and pricked his skin. He strained lightly forward against them, laughing softly at the look of indecision on the warriors' faces. The emotions which shook them were conveyed by muscular reaction to the points of their *assegais*. They stepped slowly backward.

It was with difficulty that he restrained the impulse to brush away the *assegais* with his hand. He knew that a very little thing would sway them one way or the other; would precipitate their surrender to his will or would stiffen the arms which held the *assegais* to his chest.

There was nothing he could do—save to be himself. He took another step forward; again the warriors retreated.

"It is enough." Hervey recognized Thuso's voice. And Thuso, the son of the paramount chief, was a man of authority. "Take him to my father. If that one orders the white man to be put to death—the fault is his for he has stepped outside the protection given him."

As the warriors mutely made way for him Hervey stepped resolutely forward. When he had passed beyond the light of the lamp he was conscious that he was surrounded by an unseen escort. He could hear their deep breathing and the patter of their feet. The scent of their acrid, sweaty bodies stung his nostrils.

He heard Blake shout despairingly:

"Come back, Hervey. Come back, you fool!"

Then the night air was disturbed by the heavy report of a shotgun and buckshot pattered like hail on the hard ground all about him. He heard several exclamations of pain and cursed, softly, at his carelessness. He should have made sure that Blake could not have helped himself to arms from his store.

He hesitated and looked back over his shoulder. He thought he saw a dark shadow creeping up the *stoep* steps. Then the lamp went out, broken by a well aimed missile.

Almost immediately there followed the sound of another shot—or it might have been the slamming of the screen door of the store. Hervey was not sure which. And he could not go back to investigate. The natives who surrounded him would not, he knew, permit him to turn back from the course on which he had embarked. Besides, he had no real concern. The welfare of a people was of more importance than the fate of one lone white man.

WHEN Hervey came to the *kraal* of Tomasi, the chief, passing through the narrow opening in the pole stockade, he found himself the center of a pushing, shouting throng of drum maddened men and women. The flares they carried grotesquely illuminated their hate distorted faces. They shouted threats and curses at him. They showered him with filth and spat at him. But for Thuso and the escort of warriors who accompanied him they would have torn him limb from limb.

He tried not to see them as he proceeded slowly along the narrow lane which Thu-

so's men, by dint of harsh words and blows, made through the screaming crowd. He knew that, for the present, they were not the people with whom he had lived in peaceful friendship during the past five years. The beat of the drums had subtly altered all values and he represented to them, now, the rule of the white man made detestable by the actions of Blake.

Though inwardly enraged and distressed at their treatment of him, he contrived to present a calm, unruffled appearance. He seemed like an automaton, unmoved by their threats and scowls; unmoved and unregarding, even, the filth which stained his clothes.

There was something majestic about his progress, something allied to the calm serenity of a mighty river flowing unchecked to its goal. And that "something" communicated itself at last to the people. The shouts died down to a sullen murmur; the lane widened and the warriors of Thuso were no longer forced to beat a way for Hervey with their knobkerries. Men whose hands were full of filth to throw spread wide their fingers and, shamefacedly, wiped their hands clean on their naked thighs.

And so Hervey came at last to the council place where a large fire painted the darkness with lurid yellow flames. The clearing was ringed by the huts of the people. At the upper end, opposite Hervey's point of entrance, was the hut of Tomasi.

That grossly fat man was seated on a backless, three legged stool. He bent forward a little as if to support his stupendously fat belly on his naked, brawny thighs. His normally jovial face was distorted by the passionate anger of an autocrat whose imperious will has been crossed.

To his right, and a little behind him, stood M'Songo, the witch doctor. A shriveled, emaciated, monkey of a man whose physcial feebleness was disguised and made hideous by the ritualistic regalia of his craft.

Grouped about these two sat the wise men of the tribe—veterans of many bloody fights, their old blood running warm again in anticipation of a return to the days of raiding, rapine and indiscriminate looting.

To their left, under a *marula* tree, the drummers of the *kraal* squatted at their instruments. Not once did their beat falter or the tempo change.

Tum-tum-chi! Tum-tum-chi!

The monotonous reiteration was maddening. It produced within Hervey a sensation that he, himself, was a drum on which fingers were playing a devil's tattoo. His scalp tingled. Despite his self-control, he found himself timing his steps to the beat of the drums. His carriage was strangely stiff. At every third step he brought his foot down with a stamp and paused slightly before continuing. But his mind was clear; his eyes steady. Not once did he waver from his purpose; not once did his eyes shift their focus from the face of Tomasi. He tried to project his will beyond the barrier of hate and forgetfulness which had been conjured up by the drums between himself and Tomasi.

There was scarcely a man, woman or child among all those who now swarmed into the council place at his heels, whose lot had not been improved by Hervey's residence in the district. They had called him "the friend". It was a title well earned; fully deserved. But he knew that an appeal to them, based on the privileges of friendship, was foredoomed to failure. He could not reason with them. Sentimental references to friendship would fall on stony ground. An attempt to show them the evil consequences of their abortive uprising would be regarded as a confession of weakness, of fear. They were in no mood to listen to, or believe, facts of the devastating powers of the weapons of civilization which would be used against them if they persisted in their folly: of bursting shells which would wipe out their largest *kraals;* which would pulverize rocky fastnesses and reduce kopjes to the level of the veld. They would laugh at a description of a gun whereby two white men, alone, could decimate a charging *impi*.

The drums breed forgetfulness as well as hate. Besides, had not the *Umlimo* promised to turn aside the bullets from the white man's guns? All this Hervey considered during the short space of time needed to carry him across the open space to where Tomasi sat with his headmen.

He saw M'Songo lean over and whisper in Tomasi's ear. Tomasi, frowning thoughtfully, nodded a silent assent. M'Songo shouted a shrill order and warriors closed about Hervey. His body became the hub of a circle on which their *assegai* points rested.

The pressure of the spears forced Hervey to a halt. He was conscious of a momentary flicker of uneasiness. He had hoped to get very close to Tomasi—it would be hard to project his personality across the space which yawned between them. But that feeling of failure quickly passed. This was better. All the people of the *kraal* would now hear the words that were passed between himself and Tomasi. That was as it should be. It was their *indaba.*

A smile creased the fat of Tomasi's face. The smile of a savage pandering to his blood lust.

"This," Hervey said in a clear, contemptuous voice which, carrying above the beat of the drums, hushed the confused, murmurous clamor of the people, "is the folly of children. And you—" he pointed a condemning finger at Tomasi—"are a fool."

The people gasped at the bold audacity of his words. His speech splashed drops of water on the flames of rebellion.

FOR a little while there was a great silence; a silence which seemed to muffle the beating of the drums. The yapping of dogs seemed strangely remote; the lowing of cattle in a nearby *scherm* sounded no more to Hervey than the distant whisper of a hidden stream.

And then, coinciding with the last note of the drum beat, the silence was ruptured by a mighty shout—

"Kill!"

It was repeated again and again. The air throbbed with the clamorous cry of the people for Hervey's blood.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The cries and the drum beats merged into one expression of hate.

Tomasi raised his hand. His order for silence was instantly obeyed. He smiled again as M'Songo whispered in his ear.

He clapped his hands thrice and when a young maiden, bending low, brought a calabash of beer to him, he snatched it from her and, putting it to his lips, drank slowly. His eyes peered steadily at Hervey over the curve of the calabash. He was like a fat, malicious child meditating some infantile cruelty.

Finally the calabash dropped from his hands to his thighs, to the ground. His chest was flecked white with yeasty drippings from the pot.

"So," he said slowly, "you say that I am a fool."

"Truly," Hervey agreed emphatically.

"But the beer was good," Tomasi said. "It was the result of careful brewing. Into it went the labors of my people and the skill of my leaders of *impis.* M'Songo blessed it. The *Umlimo* smiled on it. Into it was gathered all that makes my people a people. It drowns all weakness and all evil. You would tell me not to drink it?"

"What do I care," Hervey said with a shrug of his shoulders. Yet he well understood that Tomasi was using the beer as a symbol of his people's rebellion. "You are not a child. If the beer is brewed and put to your lips, then drink it. It is no concern of mine. Doubtless it is a good beer. So wash your belly out with it. It is all one to me. Why should I care?"

Tomasi looked at him thoughtfully.

"If you are the man you were, you do care," he said. "Maybe the drums have changed you. They speak with a loud voice."

"Yet you can not hear them," Hervey retorted. "Either that, or your wits have left you."

"What mean you?"

"That you have not read their message—their true message."

"And have I not? Have I not?" Tomasi leaned back and laughed boisterously.

"You are a fool. You are all fools!"

Hervey's voice checked Tomasi's mirth. He leaned forward once again. He mouthed inarticulately, anger for the moment choking him.

And when speech once again came to him his anger was modified by the whispered counsel of M'Songo.

He said, his lips smiling but not his eyes:

"The maidens shall bring more beer. You shall drink and judge for yourself whether the brew be good or not."

"It is all one to me," Hervey said wearily.

His words and attitude puzzled Tomasi and those who advised him. Defiance they could have understood—and dealt with. But this indifference to a thing which was so vital to them was beyond their understanding. He was like a deep rooted rock in the midst of a turbulent river, unmoved by the currents which swirl against it. Time alone could change such a rock; but time can also alter the course of a river.

Tomasi groped for an explanation of Hervey's attitude.

"You," he said slowly, "left the place where you were surrounded by *Umlimo's* protection. Why?"

"Ask Thuso why I left that place," Hervey replied.

"He came," Thuso said, answering Tomasi's look of inquiry, "he came despite our appeals to him to remain where he was. Even though spears barred his way, he left that place. He demanded that we bring him before you. He said there was work to be done."

And more Thuso said, relating all that had happened at the store. When he spoke of the wounding of a warrior by a bullet from Blake's gun, Tomasi frowned angrily at M'Songo. The people, too, muttered uneasily.

"Maybe," Tomasi said slowly, addressing Hervey, "you doubted the *Umlimo's* protection and came to me—trusting that a memory of things past would stay the spears of my warriors from tasting your blood."

"I call you a fool. Is that asking for protection?"

Tomasi nodded.

"In a way," he said gravely. "Each time you call me a fool my choler rises yet higher. In an excess of anger I might order the warriors to kill you instead—" he smiled malevolently—"of handing you over to the women who kill slowly—very slowly."

"Words!" Hervey exclaimed impatiently. "The words of a fool—and there is much to be done."

"What is this work you speak of?" Tomasi asked, laughing at M'Songo and those others with him.

Their faces reflected their thoughts. Now, they reasoned, the white man would try to turn them from their purpose. Their replies would fan the ardor of the people. So they were content to let him speak.

"Will you listen to me in silence," Hervey asked casually. "I am no child to throw my voice against a hill and be satisfied with its echo."

"We will listen," Tomasi assured him. He appealed to the people, "You hear? We listen in silence to the white man."

"We hear. We obey," they answered.

"Speak then, white man," Tomasi urged with a complacent smile.

"All this day," Hervey began flatly, "I have sat at the door of my hut watching the veld and the things which moved on the veld. The trails were black with women and maidens hurrying to this place. Why?"

"Before my warriors go into battle—it is the custom; you know it—they must first beget men. So, no matter how goes the day, the race lives."

"And," Hervey continued equably, "I also saw cattle driven from other *kraals* to this one. *Wo-we!* Their numbers were so great that the dust churned

up by their feet hovered like clouds over the veld. Why are the cattle brought to this place?"

"You ask me questions," said Tomasi, "that a child can answer. Before battle my warriors must eat. Also the cattle have been brought here to be placed under a strong guard. The cattle are our wealth and our strength. If they are taken from us, what is left?"

"I am answered," Hervey interrupted quietly.

HE LOOKED toward the fire. Above the level of the roof huts the smoke flattened out, streaming toward the south.

"The wind blows from the north," he observed lightly, and smiled.

That for a moment held the people. A deeper hush fell upon them as they looked for some mystical significance in his words.

Then his laugh jarred them and his voice, as he continued, seemed to thrust them from the heights of imagery to which their imaginations had taken them.

"Tonight," he said, "I saw the darkness in the north lighted by flames. Where there is no *kraal*, I saw a fire."

Tomasi laughed shortly.

"The flames ate up the building of that evil white man the government set in authority over us. Thereat I and my people rejoice. It is the beginning of the end."

Hervey ignored the note of exultation in the chief's voice. He did not flinch when one of the warriors straightened his arm a little—swayed by enthusiasm induced by the chief's prophecy—so that the point of his spear was buried an inch deep in Hervey's thigh.

"Take him away!" Tomasi shouted angrily, pointing at the native who stared dumbly from the tip of his blood reddened spear to the widening blotch of crimson which stained Hervey's white trousers.

"The fault was the drums', not his," Hervey said as warriors seized the man and dragged him from the council place.

He could make no further appeal for the man's life—and that was forfeit for daring to wound in the chief's presence. He tried not to hear the thud of blows and the gasp of breath leaving a lifeless body. There was more at stake than the life of one man.

"There is work to be done," Hervey cried.

"My patience is nearly at an end," Tomasi said sourly. His fat fingers closed firmly on the haft of his *assegai*.

He looked calculatingly at Hervey as if estimating where to make a thrust that would be pain-giving, but not fatal. He looked questioningly at M'Songo and his headman. They were looking at Hervey. Their expressions were of puzzled wonder.

Tomasi smacked his thick lips. Curiosity still ruled him—and doubt.

"Where does all this lead to?" he asked.

Hervey laughed.

"Your warriors set fire to a white man's house. An act of folly. And yet, if your eyes had been opened, if the drums had not stopped up your ears, no great harm would have been done. Listen. The wind tossed sparks and brands from the burning house high into the air. Some died before they returned to earth. But not all. Assuredly not all. And those that lived— *Wo-we!* When they fell they found food for their appetite. It has been long since the rains fell—and a wind to carry them forward to fresher grazing grounds. A wind, Tomasi, that blows from the north."

"Well?" Tomasi's question sounded like the sigh of a man awaking from a dream of soft living to the hardships of fact. "Well," he questioned again, voicing the fears of the people.

"Is it well?" Hervey cried. "Judge for yourselves if it is well. You are fools, but your cattle are not fools! They sense the doom that is hastening upon them. I can hear their lowing. I can hear the thud of their feet. The sound of that drowns the beating of the drums. *Wo-we!*

The smell of their roasting flesh will soon pollute the air! Does that prospect not move you?

"A flood of fire threatens to engulf you. It will wash away your *kraals;* it will destroy your cattle. Who knows? It may encircle this place—and your smoke choked bodies shall not stay its hunger. Bah! And you talk to me of a beer you have brewed! What good is that, if there are none left to drink it?"

He paused then, eying Tomasi scornfully, that the chief and his followers might get the full import of his words. Warriors sped from the council place in response to orders from their captains. They returned almost immediately, shouting and gesturing and hoarse with excitement:

"The veld is afire! The wind blows rivers of flame toward us!"

Tomasi rose heavily to his feet, his face lined with anxiety. His advisers crowded about him. For a moment their wits left them. They shouted orders and countermanded them; they jostled M'Songo roughly and silenced him when he would have spoken to the people.

The people milled about like cattle in the slaughter pen. Their eyes were riveted on the northern sky. A yellow glow suffused it. Here and there tongues of flame shot upward to incredible heights.

Other messengers breathlessly made their way to the chief and gasped out their reports—

"The *kraal* of Matisdiswa is swallowed up by the fire—"

"Cattle from Jhentsi's *kraal,* and the herders, have been overtaken by the flames. They are not—"

Tomasi turned from one headman to another, seeking support and counsel —and finding only bewildered panic. They could not help him. He could not help himself. He was only an old and grossly fat man who waddled about in a futile manner, trying to impose his authority, unable to find any who would listen to him.

THE wails of the women and the screams of frightened children were now added to the tumult. The nearness of the fire peril was at last evident to all. The yellow glare was nearer; bright, far flying sparks starred the sky. The people sweated with fear as, in their imaginations, they felt the heat of a great fire on their naked bodies.

The drums were silent. The drummers sat with heads bent, staring apathetically at the ground.

The warriors who had guarded Hervey joined those others who were trying to create some semblance of order among the men, women and children who were fighting their way out of the *kraal.*

Hervey ran to where the drummers sat. He spoke to them sharply. They stared at him uncomprehendingly.

He repeated his order and then one, nodding enthusiastically, commenced to beat his drum. The others took up the beat—listlessly at first but with gradually increasing fervor. Presently the rhythm throbbed through the *kraal,* conquering panic, uniting the people once again into a disciplined whole.

Tum-tum-tum-tum! Tum-tum-tum-tum!

It was like the calm, normal beating of a people's heart. It lifted them above fear. It was stronger than the blood lustful passions of that other beat.

Hervey ran to where Tomasi stood, and greeted him with a grim smile.

"We have a fight before us," he said. "You will help us?"

"I have a name among you," Hervey replied. "Shall I throw filth on it."

Tomasi nodded silently.

The menace of the fire and the change of the drumbeat had destroyed all hate, all misunderstandings. And Tomasi was once again master of himself and of his people; his headmen remembered that they had fought fire before . . .

Orders were quickly given and as quickly obeyed. To each man, woman and child—acting under appointed leaders—a definite part was given. The *kraal* swarmed with a seeming panic of

confusion. But there was no panic, no confusion.

The cattle and goats were released from their *scherms* and sent away in charge of young herd boys and girls to some shallow pools in the riverbed half a mile distant. There was a vague chance that there they might be safe even if the onrush of the fire were not checked.

The men and women left the *kraal* in orderly ranks, carrying digging tools and blankets and huge calabashes full of water.

They quickly scattered, covering a wide front, and grimly commenced the task of cheating the fire, of saving their *kraal* from the fiery fate which threatened it.

It was a stupendous task which confronted them—a task which might well have overwhelmed them with a sense of the futility of their puny efforts. But the voices of Tomasi and his headmen heartened them; the voice of the white man, the friend, encouraged them—and the beat of the drums stiffened their backbones.

The fire was no more than half a mile from the *kraal* now. The little rivers of flame which had been created by sparks from the burning of Blake's house had united and spread with incredible rapidity until they presented a solid wall of fire which crept implacably forward. It covered a frontage of over a mile; a scimitar shaped front, its ends converging inward. A bow of leaping flames which shot forth experimental arrows of fire toward the *kraal.* Here and there animals could be seen stampeding before it. Some dashed blindly through the line of fire fighters, and not a hand was lifted to slay them.

The women rooted up the long grass, they dug trenches. The men advanced nearer the fire. They set back fires. They beat out those arrows of fire which shot out from the moving furnace. The intense heat seared their woolly hair and singed their eyebrows. For a time sweat oiled their bodies. Then they could no longer sweat. Here and there a man would fall, overcome by the intense heat, to be hauled to safety by a comrade—to be revived by women who splashed water into his face. Then he would rise, drink thirstily and stagger back to the fighting line.

SMOKE veiled the glory of the rising sun. The tongues of flame which gashed the billowing clouds looked like molten metal. The sun had bleached the color from them. But the people still fought on, contesting each foot of ground, snarling at each backward step the oncoming fire forced them to take.

Daybreak made no difference to them. They were scarcely aware of the sun's rising. They fought with the tireless energy of automatons.

Their bodies were pitted with the burns of sparks; their throats were parched, their eyes sunk deep into their sockets. But none complained.

Hervey was everywhere, his voice hoarse from the words of encouragement which had flowed from him ceaselessly. His clothing was full of holes; his arms puffed by heat blisters. He had shared with Tomasi the burden of directing the efforts of the fire fighters. And only once had the two men disagreed. That had been when Tomasi would have detailed men to take all possible precautions to save the store from the flames. Hervey would have none of it. The store, he said, did not matter; men could not be spared.

And Hervey gained his point. He scarcely noted the destruction of the store. It was all over so quickly. For a few moments sheets of flame crested the hill. When they died away, there was no more store: only a pile of smoke blackened, smoldering ruins.

At high noon victory was in sight. The wind had died down and the fire's advance was halted at the edge of the wide area of ground which had been cleared by the women. But there was still plenty to do and the people were almost dropping with fatigue. Their nightlong exertions had drained their vitality. At one point,

by some chance freak, the flames leaped across the cleared space and gained a good hold before the fighters could rally to the danger spot. It looked as if all their previous exertions was labor in vain. A spirit of fatalistic resignation seemed to govern the people. Their efforts were now spasmodic and, for all his eloquence and frantic pleadings, Hervey could not rouse them.

Help came at an opportune time.

Twenty troopers of the mounted police, led by Sergeant Hodges—a veteran of many native fights—had made a record breaking ride in the hope of arriving before the fires of rebellion had spread beyond control of the small force of whites detached to take care of the trouble. They were young, eager spirits who—in spite of the sergeant's warnings—had regarded the possibility of a scrap with the natives as a glorious adventure. They were doubtless a little disappointed when, reining their sweating mounts to a halt, they saw only a long line of weary fire fighters instead of *impis* of brawny warriors drawn up for battle.

Their faces expressed disgust as they listened to the brief conversation of their sergeant with a white man whose eyes were bloodshot, his face and ragged clothing smoke begrimed. A man who swayed drunkenly and would have fallen but for the hand the sergeant put out to steady him.

"No," they heard him say. "Of course not, Sergeant. Of course there's no rebellion. Don't be foolish. Use your eyes, man . . . The fire? How should I know what started it? How do bush fires start, anyway? Damn it, man! Don't talk—work."

Orders came from the sergeant then, fast and furious. The troopers had no time for self-pity; no time to remember that they were fatigued by their long ride. They tumbled out of their saddles and ran to the place where the fire threatened to sweep onward to the *kraal*. Their cheerful blasphemies and enthusiastic attacks on the flames restored the flagging morale of the natives who now, as they worked, chanted a song of victory.

Their arms rose and fell in unison with the beating of the drums.

At the time of sun-under the veld all about the *kraal* was blackened, smoking stubble. Here and there little jets of flame appeared but were immediately extinguished by the men who had been appointed to keep guard.

The drums were beating at the *kraal*—the tempo was that of a dance. The people of Tomasi were celebrating the preservation of their *kraal* and herds from the fire.

Speeches had been made acknowledging the debt of gratitude due Hervey, thanking the white troopers for their timely assistance. Not one reference was made to that other fire which had threatened to consume the bond of peace which must exist between the white man and the black if a young colony would achieve prosperity.

HERVEY sat on a stool at the door of Tomasi's hut. He was a very weary, but contented, man. His store and goods had been totally destroyed. But that was nothing. He could build again and his final financial independence was assured; he could capitalize that for his store's benefit . . .

Occasionally he looked up and smiled in response to Tomasi's broken words of gratitude. Occasionally he clapped his hands in time to the beat of the drums and shouted words of commendation to the happy, smiling dancers.

But chiefly he concentrated on the task of writing—in a notebook borrowed from one of the troopers—a full and confidential report of the affair to his cousin, Henry Hervey. He had at first been tempted to deny that Tomasi's people had actually come out in open rebellion. His colder judgment ruled against that. Nothing could be gained by hushing things up. To ignore the killing of the native messengers and of Blake—Hervey had found the remains of that man's body in the ashes of the store—would lead to mis-

understandings and a contempt of the white man's boasted impartial justice.

So everything went into Hervey's report. He added suggestions and recommendations. He outlined a policy of administration based on his own experience.

All this he did to guide the man who would be appointed in Blake's place.

This report, Hervey knew, would lead to investigations and trials and punishments. But, if properly handled by a sympathetic and understanding commissioner, the punishments would leave no bitterness, no resentment.

At last, the report finished—it filled the notebook with his neat handwriting—he sighed, signed it "Tom Hervey, Trader" and stared blankly before him. He pulled absently on the lobe of his left ear as he idly conjectured on the personality of the man who would be sent to replace Blake.

He heard the confused lowing of cattle. The herders were bringing the beasts back to the *kraal*. A smile softened the tired lines of his face. The beasts would find scanty grazing for a few days. He pictured them wandering disconsolately over the fire blackened veld, clouding the air with ashes disturbed by their hungry muzzling. But the rains were very near. Soon a new growth would carpet the veld with green; the grass would be all the sweeter for its baptism of fire.

He started at the sound of the sergeant's voice. Looking up, he saw the officer standing stiffly at attention before him.

"Well, Sergeant?" he asked, wondering at the man's attitude.

"I was told to give you this, sir," the sergeant said, fumbling in his tunic pocket. "I'd almost forgotten it, what with the excitement and all."

He handed Hervey an officially stamped envelop, saluted and rejoined his troopers who were watching the dancing.

Hervey turned the envelop over and over, trying to guess its contents. At length, with a shrug of his shoulders, he tore it open and read the letter it contained. It was officially terse.

> This is to notify you that you have been appointed native commissioner of the Tomasi District. You will, without delay, take over from Native Commissioner Blake who is transferred to headquarters—

Then followed a paragraph or two relating to the duties, powers and pay which accompanied the appointment; calling his attention to the fact that the appointment barred him from trading or partaking in any prospecting or commercial undertaking.

The letter was signed Henry Hervey . . .

Tom Hervey laughed. Tomasi looked at him wonderingly.

"A dog's pay," Tom Hervey muttered.

"The *inkosi* says?" Tomasi questioned.

Hervey started, conscious that he had spoken his thoughts aloud.

"My store is destroyed," he said. "I am a beggar among you, Tomasi."

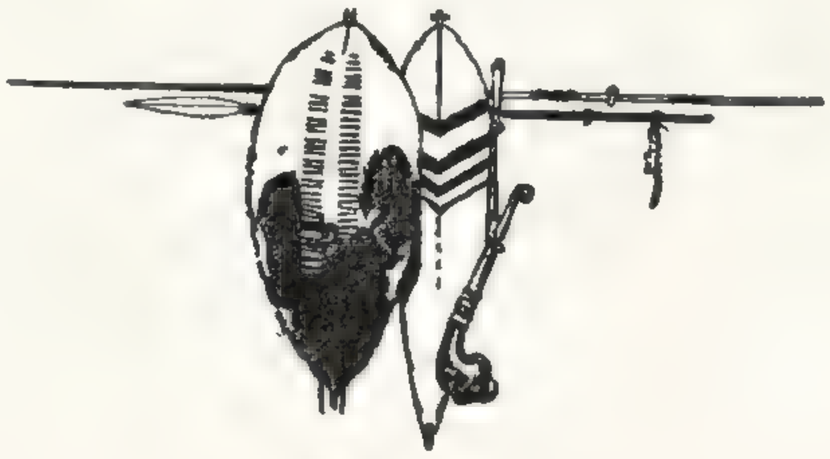
The headman shook his head vigorously.

"My people shall build you a new and bigger store. They shall trade with you and question not the price you offer. Your wealth shall be measured by your desires. You are no beggar."

Hervey laughed again, happily.

He read again the report he had written; he nodded approval of the points he had made, of the policy he had outlined.

When he came to the end he erased the signature he had written. In its place he wrote with a flourish: Thomas Hervey, Native Commissioner.



By the Author of "Dobe

SITTING BULL

The first of three articles on the great warrior-champion of the Sioux

By STANLEY VESTAL

THE Sioux believe that a child is the greatest and best gift of all, and therefore Sitting Bull was welcomed at his birth. He was born on the south bank of the Ree River, now called the Grand, at a place called Many Caches, because of the many old storage pits there, a few miles below the present town of Bullhead, South Dakota. This happened during the Winter-When-Eyes-Played-in-the-Snow, in the month of March, 1831.

At that time, however, no one could foresee his later fame and power, and he began life with no better title than the nickname Slow. Apparently he deserved it. For they say that, even as an infant, he was deliberate. When an object was put into his baby hand he did not stick it in his mouth right away, like most children, but held it in his hand, turning it over and looking at it until he made up his mind. But once he accepted it, he was loath to let it go.

This deliberation, and a certain awkwardness with which he moved his sturdy body, earned him the nickname by which his world knew him for fourteen years.

That world was one in which Achilles or Odysseus would have felt at home. In those days the Sioux warrior had a dignified self-reliance which some of his luckless descendants have lost. "They are all gentlemen," wrote a Jesuit missionary. And so they were. Gentlemen of the epic, not the romantic mold. Aristocrats without the modern aristocrat's softness. Unafraid as any peasant of the hard labor of their hunters' life, yet without a trace of the peasant's eternal subservience.

Their camps contained no servile vassals. And their chiefs were neither idle nor ostentatious, but shared the work and dangers of their people and maintained their rank by sheer personal superiority.

Slow was a strong, lively lad, and found this world greatly to his liking. What wonder? Was not the Sioux or Dakota Nation the greatest in the world, so far as he knew? Were not the Tetons, or Prairie Sioux, the most numerous and powerful division of that great nation?

Were not the Hunkpapa, his own tribe, the bravest and most war-like of all the Tetons? Their warriors were victorious on every front; their hunting grounds were in the very heart of the buffalo plains and teemed with every

Walls" and "Kit Carson"

kind of game; their camps were full of fast horses; their territory contained every sort of country—timber, prairie, river bottom, badlands and mountain-tops. So vast it was that his people were constantly on the move, traveling in their leisurely fashion from river to river and range to range, following their buffaloes, and patrolling that rich domain to keep out the enemies who hovered on their frontiers, where—as yet—no shadow of the white invader had fallen.

While Slow was still strapped to his baby board, he rode slung from the horn of his mother's rawhide saddle, peering out from under the decorated hood at the ever changing panorama of the ample plains. When somewhat older he surveyed the world from the snug folds of a shaggy buffalo robe upon his mother's shoulders. Later she put him in a basket slung between two lodge poles crossed above her pony's withers, and there he sat, jouncing along under the horse's tail, watching the grass slide by beneath him, holding fast with small brown hands when the going was rough, or closing his eyes tight against the splashing water when the old nag forded a stream.

By the time he was five he was riding behind his mother, chubby legs out-

spread, his hands clinging to her belt.

Before he was ten he rode a pony of his own, shaping his plastic legs to the curve of the animal's barrel—a curve which would make him slightly bow-legged as long as he lived.

With the possession of that pony, Slow entered upon the carefree, active, interesting life of the Indian boy, upon whom no restraints were laid other than the duty of rising early, hunting small game with bow and arrows and perhaps herding the family stock through long, lazy days on the prairie. What careless, pleasant, outdoor lives those boys led! A life all games and sports—footraces, pony races, follow-my-leader up and down the bluffs, swimming all day long in the river, or wrestling with the Cheyenne neighbor boys in the intimate Cheyenne manner. And when boyish sports palled, hanging about to watch the endlessly changing activities of their elders, whom they mimicked in private. Slow liked it all.

How agreeable that constant traveling! The gray mornings when he rounded up the family ponies, while his mother furled the white tent, lashed the tent poles to the saddle of her packhorse and rode away atop a mountain of baggage, leaving behind only a feeble column of smoke rising from between the flattened rectangles of grass where the beds had been. How jolly to ride with his boy companions on the edges of that great crawling ruck of equipage, watching the snarling, wolf-like dogs trotting under their packs, their long red tongues lolling across their white fangs; watching the plodding packmules, the loose horses, the stray colts plunging about, the scolding of exasperated women.

How amusing the loud, impatient harangues of old men, the shouted, broad jests of heralds, the singing—the endless singing—of warriors parading on the flanks in all the glory of eagle plumes, paint, fine horses and lances tossing athwart the sky! And there was always the chance of flushing game along the line of march, the pursuits, the pony races, the boyish boasts, the feats of horsemanship before the eyes of the girls.

And when the final halt was made, and the great circle of tapering teepees mushroomed on the plain, each tent in its appointed order, band by band and family by family, how good the smell of wood smoke and meat cooking, how savory the steaming soup in the kettle, the big wooden bowls of crisp white tipsin. How filling the brown pemmican larded with buffalo tallow; how tart and spicy the wild chokecherries. And when the warriors had made a hunt, how satisfying to spend the night going over the huge stacks of fresh meat, searching out choice tidbits—of buffalo hump, or bear's ribs, or haunch of good fat venison!

And always, at night, when he had eaten all that a small potbelly could hold, how jolly to sit by the brisk little fire in the conical tent and be put to sleep with innumerable myths of Unktom, trickster and fool, with legends of animals which spoke to man, giving good advice, with hero tales of his people, of their far travels, their great bravery, and of the cowardly, sneaking enemies who skulked about their camps at night and never dared show their faces in the daytime.

Then he would hear how the Sioux first met the Iroquois, long ago, and how the Iroquois haughtily demanded—

"Who are you?"

"Sioux," came the answer. "And who are you?"

"Iroquois. Where are you going?"

"We are hunting for buffalo," the Sioux replied. "And you?"

"We are looking for *men*," had come the haughty answer.

"Well, we are men," said the Sioux. "You need look no farther."

Whereupon the fight began, and when it was over the Sioux had killed or captured all those Iroquois. They slit the noses of their captives and let them go.

"Tell your chiefs," they said, "to send no more *women* looking for *men!*"

And when he heard that, the boy Slow would sway restlessly on his haunches, arms folded about his knees, and long for the day when he himself could share such brave adventures. He was proud of his nation.

Slow's mind was not obsessed by thoughts of sex or hunger. Among his people women were plenty, celibacy unknown, and a marriage could be formed or dissolved at will. All material comforts were homemade, and the woman could provide them readily—if only her man were a passable hunter. No, it was not love of woman or lust for wealth that haunted the dreams of the Sioux. Their country supplied all their needs, and they took sex in their stride. Love of prestige was the fire which consumed their hearts, and upon this passion all their institutions were erected. To them prestige was all-important, and it was to be won on the warpath. Slow envied the warriors. Though born a male, he as yet rated no better than a woman.

Those mighty men rode away to die or conquer, and came home again in loud triumph, bringing new horses, bringing hair and captured weapons, bringing strange foreign women to be adopted into the tribe. How they sang and boasted of their exploits, how grandly they paraded around the camp circle, how they stamped and postured in the unbroken series of dances in the sociable camps. What privileges they enjoyed, what dignity, what perquisites! No feast, no dance, no ceremony was complete without a war story narrated by its hero. What boy could fail to long for equal honor? Not Slow. His heart was full of war . . .

"It is better to lie naked than to rot on a scaffold."

That old proverb rang in his head as he rode idly about the Summer camp of his people, reining in his gray pony now and then to watch some man straightening arrows or repairing a saddle, to watch some woman—perhaps in tears—swiftly plying her bright awl as she made new moccasins, pair after pair, and stuffed them full of good fat pemmican for the war party which was about to start.

TO SLOW war was no remote matter of hearsay. He had been born and reared in the midst of it. When he was little, his mother had often dressed his baby feet in tiny moccasins before she went to sleep at night, because they might have to run out of the tent and hide if an enemy attacked. He had learned to fear the hoot of the owl, which might really be the signal of prowling foes—perhaps Crow Indians—who would cut a small boy to pieces if they caught him. Wounds and tears and wild rejoicings, war dances, victory dances, with all their lively pantomime of battle, ambush and sudden death, were part of his daily life. Only a few moons before, his uncle had been left for dead on the battlefield.

Slow knew that on the frontiers of his nation were the bones of many heroes, who lay as they had fallen, stripped for battle, fighting his enemies. And when the wind was right, the boy did not need to turn his eyes toward the nearby hills in order to sense the gaunt burial scaffolds, which carried the carcasses of men who had died ingloriously in their beds—of sickness, or old age. He had often heard old men shouting their complaints among the tents—how they suffered from toothache, sore bones, from cold, from neglect.

Slow himself was young and strong, with a deep chest, broad shoulders, though of no great height for his years. Four Winters back he had killed his first buffalo calf, and already he was beginning to feel himself a man. He longed to prove it. Yes, it was true. It is better to lie naked on the field of honor than to rot on a burial scaffold . . .

Members of the war party were already mounted and jogging out of camp, leading their best horses, going quietly away by twos and threes, to meet at

the appointed rendezvous and start off against the Crows, the Assiniboin, or the Hohe, looking for scalps and horses. For two days the camp had been humming with excitement over the departure of the warriors. Now the men were leaving.

There was no farewell, no brass band to see them off. The Teton Sioux reserved their cheers for successful fighters. Any one could go to war. The question was, what would he do when he got there?

Slow watched the men ride away, deliberating. But not for long. His mind was made up. He decided to go too.

He did not inform his family of this intention. His mother, a strong minded, serious woman, full of common sense, might raise objection, and Slow always listened to her. Then again, his two sisters might cry and beg him to stay at home, and remind him that he was just a boy, only fourteen years old. That would be unpleasant; and besides, it was very awkward, almost impossible, to refuse the request of a close relative. And of course it was not the part of a man to consult a woman about war! Slow turned his pony's nose away from the camp and followed the last of the warriors.

When Slow reached the rendezvous of the war party he found twenty men assembled, among them his own father. They stared in silence at this uninvited volunteer, at his barebacked gray pony, his boyish calfskin robe, his small quiver full of blunt headed arrows, good only for shooting small birds. All at once the boy felt the silent disapproval of these men, felt that perhaps he might be unwelcome. He rode up to his father, who waited to hear his son explain himself. The pony seemed to be Slow's best, perhaps his only, friend just then. Slipping from its back and throwing one arm over its neck, he declared—

"We are going too."

The father listened to that simple statement, and his heart was big with pride. The family had always taken care never to thwart the boy or break his spirit, and now it was too late to begin. It was no good attempting to budge Slow, once he had made up his mind. His father did not try.

Four years back the boy had killed his first buffalo. And more recently, when a prowling enemy was killed close by the tents, the boy had shown his courage. For when the men dragged the slain man into the circle of teepees, and egged on the boys to go up and touch that strange, bloody image of death, Slow had been the first to go. That day he showed more bravery than any boy in camp.

"You have a good running horse," said his father. "Try to do something brave. That man is most successful who is foremost. And in hunting or in war that man is foremost who has the fastest horse."

Slow's father gave him a *coup*-stick—a long, peeled wand with a feather tied at the small end—a stick to be used in striking the enemy. The boy had brought no weapons and perhaps his father thought him too young to use them to advantage. Perhaps he thought it braver to go into the fight without weapons, to strike the enemy with a harmless stick.

When the necessary ceremonies had been performed, and the leader had given his orders, the young men set out. Good-Voiced-Elk was leader.

They started. Then it was loping, loping, loping away to the north and west toward the place where Red Water empties into Muddy Water, the Missouri River. There they hoped to encounter enemies.

Perhaps on that first expedition Slow endured the usual horseplay and joking which it was the custom to inflict upon the novice. Perhaps they tried to scare him to make his heart strong, singing a song about how his mother had hanged herself for grief at his departure. Perhaps the leader was not pleased to have an uninvited volunteer along. Or perhaps they liked his spunk, or let him alone because his father was there. No

one remembers all that now. At any rate, they rode hard for the mouth of Red Water.

PLAINS Indian warfare, as practised in those days, was probably the finest sport ever known in this world. No man who loves horseflesh and the bright face of danger but must long to have shared its thrilling chances. It had all the dash and speed of polo, the informality of a fox hunt, the sporting chance of sudden wealth afforded by the modern horse-race, and danger enough to satisfy the most reckless. It was no game for mollycoddles, for the Plains Indian seldom gave, and never expected, quarter.

Yet its prime object was not bloodshed or manslaughter. The warrior unless he was out for loot, or revenge for recent injuries, or fighting in defense of his family, made war a grandstand play.

He fought, not so much to damage his enemy, as to distinguish himself. In very early times the Sioux warrior had fought at close quarters, simply because he had no long range weapons. Later, when he had obtained these, he still regarded hand-to-hand combat as the only manly form of battle. He still felt that a brave man would grapple with his foe. On this conviction he erected his elaborate system of military honors, citations and insignia of rank. He still desired, above everything, to strike his enemy with his hand, or with something held in his hand. And to accomplish this he was often willing to take dreadful risks.

This touching or striking the enemy—alive or dead—was the goal of every warrior. It is known as the *coup*, a term borrowed from the French frontiersmen. As a war honor, it ranked far above the mere killing of an enemy. Rescues, wounds and captured horses or weapons also counted for honors; but the *coup* was the great prize. And so it was the object of every man to win as many *coups* as possible, for all social privileges and perquisites depended upon this daring individual achievement.

Four men could count *coup* upon the same enemy in the same fight, and on that occasion were rated in the order of their touching him. For that reason, many spirited races were run to win the coveted honor of the first *coup*, and the man who won it could afford to let laggards kill and scalp his enemy. When a man struck his foe he yelled his own name aloud, adding, "I have overcome this one," so that he might have witnesses to his deed.

As soon as the fight was over the warriors got together, and each one put in a claim for the honors to which he was entitled. If he could produce witnesses to these, they were formally awarded to him. Thereafter, the winner was entitled to narrate his deed at any public gathering. In fact, he was compelled to do so, for such a war story formed the invariable credentials of a man performing any public action. Unless a man had the right to tell such a story, he was automatically barred from participation in tribal or ceremonial affairs. He was, in effect, disfranchised and disqualified. He could not even name his child.

Naturally, his comrades took good care to see that he did not claim anything he was not entitled to, and every warrior's handicap was well understood by the whole camp. In those small communities, rivalry was keen, and the concentration of all desires upon the one goal—prestige—inspired an almost insane love of public honor. There were no books to hand down the deeds of great men of old times, no great population in which the individual felt lost. The Sioux was as avid of praise as an actor, and thought in terms of "me, here, now." He did his works to be seen of men and had his reward in this world.

In short, Indian warfare on the Plains was simply a gorgeous mounted game of tag. Public honor, social privilege, wealth and the love of women were its glittering prizes; its forfeit, death.

When Slow and his comrades reached the Red Water, they sent out a scout to

look for sign of enemies. The scout soon returned, saying that enemies were coming right toward them. Good-Voiced-Elk and the others remained hidden behind a small hill, while the scout kept watch.

Before long they could see enemies coming, still quite a way off. It was a mounted party, of about the same strength as their own. Hastily the men made preparations for battle, stripping for action, uncovering their shields. They planned to lie low until the enemy came close, and then to jump him suddenly. When all was ready the men mounted and sat waiting for the leader's signal.

Just then they noticed a boy off to one side. He was mounting a gray horse almost covered with red paint. The boy himself was naked except for moccasins, breechcloth and beads, and his entire body was painted a bright yellow. It was Slow, and already he was on his war horse, starting toward the enemy, *coup*-stick in hand, unable to hold back any longer. He wanted his chance. The gray horse was off like an arrow.

In a flash, the others, not to be left behind, also charged. But the boy's horse had the start, it was good and fast, and he remained in the lead.

The startled enemy, seeing the Sioux pouring from behind their hill, drew rein. They did not know how many Sioux might be hidden behind that hill. Whirling in their tracks, they turned tail and galloped away, hard as they could quirt their ponies. Within a few minutes those on fast horses were far ahead, while those with slow mounts lagged behind, lashing their ponies, with the yells and shooting of the frantic pursuit loud in their frightened ears.

Before long, Slow was getting close to the hindmost. The man must have heard those pounding hoofs behind him gaining. Perhaps he saw that he could not hope to escape, and determined to sell his life dearly. He threw himself from his horse and turned back. Slow found himself facing a man on foot, with an arrow on his bowstring.

Men who have fought Indians all agree that by far the most desperate warriors among them were the boys. In this Slow was no exception to the rule. At such a moment a seasoned warrior would have flung himself on one side of his racing horse and wheeled away from that deadly shaft. But the boy Slow, full of fight, reckless of danger as boys will be, never swerved from his headlong course. He was too hot to win that honor, to count his first *coup,* to be foremost in his first battle. There, just ahead, was glory, manhood, the bright eyes of girls, all that he desired in life. He sped straight on, leaning forward with outstretched *coup*-stick.

Crack! He struck the enemy smartly across his forearm, spoiled his aim. The arrow never found its mark.

"*Onhey!*" yelled the boy. "I, Slow, have conquered him!" The plunging gray knocked the enemy flat, and the Sioux warriors who followed killed him before he could recover his feet.

When that running fight was over the Sioux gathered up their trophies—the horses, weapons and scalps they had taken—and set out for home. On nearing their camp they concealed themselves until dawn. Then, with a rush of plunging hoofs, wild yells of triumph and much shooting, they charged in among the smoke browned tents of their people and, forming a column, paraded around the camp circle, singing and announcing in loud voices the exploits which each man had added to his record.

Slow's father put the boy on a fine bay horse and led him around the circle of tents with the others. In a loud, proud voice he called the people to observe his son, mounted upon the bay horse, and covered from top to toe with the black paint of victory.

"My son has struck the enemy," he shouted. "He is brave. I dub him Ta-tan-ka I-yo-ta-ke—Sitting Bull!"

Slow sat upon the bay horse, his bare legs dangling, well content. He was fully conscious of the awe of his former

playmates, the applause of the warriors, the bright eyes of the girls, the shrill ululations of the women of the camp. He frankly enjoyed himself, without a trace of false modesty. His people did not regard shyness as any virtue in a man. And then his father, in order to show appreciation of his son's distinction, gave away four good horses to poor men.

THAT night, in the victory dance, a new warrior showed himself, stooping and rearing and stamping with the best. For he had not only suddenly raised himself to man's estate at the age of fourteen winters—he had actually been the first to strike the enemy; he was the hero of the occasion. His heart was big that night as he pranced and postured to the pounding of the drums, the perfect rhythm of that wild music. He was well aware of that great throng of people singing and swaying as one in the exultation of his victory; well aware of his mother's pride, his sisters' new respect, the applause of his innumerable relatives, the perfumed bodies of the girls in the ring. That was a heady and intoxicating night for the boy who had now become a man.

A new figure had stepped upon the stage of history.

Somewhat later, Sitting Bull performed a feat which added greatly to his fame among the Northern Sioux. The Sioux and Crows were having a battle on the Yellowstone, not far from the mouth of the Rosebud.

One of the Crow warriors was very brave, and when he found himself surrounded by his enemies, he stood them off on foot with his bow and arrows. He was so brave and such a good shot that none of the Sioux dared go near him. They hung back and shot arrows at him from a distance, and he shot back at them.

But they could not hit him, for he was as active and quick on his feet as a boxer. They kept on shooting, nevertheless, and pretty soon the Crow had used up all his arrows. Then the Sioux thought they had him and tried to charge him. But the Crow snatched up the arrows they had fired at him, shot them back and hit some of the Sioux. They began to think they could never get at him.

Just then Sitting Bull rode up.

"Haven't you killed that one yet?"

"No," they said, "he uses our own arrows against us. We shoot them over, and he shoots them back and is killing us that way."

"Well," said Sitting Bull, "I have some good arrows he might like to use. You boys stand back. I'll show you how to fight."

Sitting Bull took three arrows from his quiver and dismounted. Running forward, he shot one arrow at the Crow, but the Crow dodged and, running to where the arrow had stuck in the ground, snatched it up and placed it on his bowstring. Sitting Bull followed and, drawing his second arrow back to its head, let fly again.

But once more he missed. The Crow was too quick for him, a good fighter and hard to kill. And now he had Sitting Bull's two arrows, and Sitting Bull had but one.

Sitting Bull dared not risk another miss. He ran forward. The Crow loosed one of his arrows at his enemy, but dodging is a game that two can play, Sitting Bull was not hit, and still rushed forward. When he was close enough to be quite sure, he drew back his arrow and took good aim. *Twang!* went the bowstring. The arrow sped on its way, hitting the Crow in the throat. Sitting Bull snatched up his two arrows. Two more shots—one in the shoulder, one in the crotch, finished the Crow.

Sitting Bull was victor.

After that, whenever there was a battle and some reckless young man expressed a wish to go in alone and strike the enemy, some other fellow would nudge him in the ribs and answer:

"Hold there! You're not Sitting Bull."

SITTING BULL had been steadily gaining in skill and success for years. He had become one of the most successful hunters, horse stealers and warriors of his people. His father, Jumping Bull, however, still remained head of the family. But there came a day when Jumping Bull dropped out and Sitting Bull stepped into his moccasins. It happened when Sitting Bull was twenty-nine years old.

It was June, and Sitting Bull's band was in camp on the headwaters of the Cannonball River. Their teepees—rakishly tilted cones, with smoke browned tops and gaudy, painted flanks—stood in a circle on the grassy flat beside the stream. Alongside each teepee stood its stacked travois, its rack for drying meat, its outdoor kitchen of willow boughs. There the children romped, the women worked and gossiped, and the young men gambled, or, grave as statues, muffled in their blankets to their steady eyes, shyly stared at the girls. All about, on the prairie, grazed the Hunkpapa ponies, the wealth of the nation.

One day some one saw two Crow Indians skulking about in the neighborhood, but before the alarm could be given and the fighters called out, these Crows had vanished. Perhaps they were scouts sent out in advance of some larger party. Such things happened often, and but few of the Hunkpapa paid any heed. Least of all did Jumping Bull, Sitting Bull's father, care what the Crows were doing. Day and night he sat in his teepee, rocking with agony. He had a raging toothache, and none of the many remedies known to the Sioux could stop the pain. He sat there, holding his jaw, wishing his time had come. He was getting old now and his teeth began to trouble him.

Two days later the pain was worse than ever. But the Hunkpapa were breaking camp to start off to the northwest, and Jumping Bull had to go along. They were headed along the eastern flank of Rainy Butte, that great landmark near the eastern boundary of Slope County, North Dakota. Rainy Butte is almost a mountain, so long in fact that now there is a town at each end of it. It was named Rainy Butte because it rained almost every time the Hunkpapa camped there.

It was fine, sunny weather that morning, good for traveling, but so warm that it made people lazy. The Hunkpapa were slow in getting started. The women furled the white tents, lowered the lodge poles, threw their dubbers and bags and parfleches, their children and puppies, into the family travois behind the old sore backed nags and moved out on the trail to the northwest. They formed a long straggling line as they strung out across the prairie, the horses of each family running in a bunch together, the women and children riding the plodding packhorses. Two boys were in the lead.

Suddenly, without warning, over the nearest swell of the green prairie, fifty Crows came pelting at the gallop, fast as their war horses could run. The ground thumped like a drum to the beat of two hundred hoofs, the sunlight flashed from steel lanceheads, bright and keen, from the garish war paint on those naked bodies, from the flaring splotches of color on the spotted ponies. The long tail of the Crow leader's war bonnet trailed behind him like some strange feather mane. On they came, cutting across the head of the Sioux column.

At the same moment the war whoop, like the quick rattle of a machine gun, pulsated upon the startled ears of the dawdling Hunkpapa, raising prickles along their spines.

Instantly all was confusion. Packhorses balked and reared, as the women grabbed at their lariats. Dogs got in everybody's way. Women were wailing and crying, or singing Brave-Heart songs for their men. Children squalled. Above all this din could be heard the high voices of the old men, telling the women not to run, but to get together

on the ridge and hold the horses there. Meanwhile the young men were gathering to resist the attack.

But before they could do anything the Crows had cut off the two leading boys, had struck one of them down in plain sight of the Hunkpapa. The Crow attack was swift and sudden. They outnumbered the Sioux, and they had the enormous advantage of complete surprise.

Probably these Crows had come to steal horses, but, finding their enemies on the move, had recklessly charged them, trusting to superior numbers. Now it is one thing to steal horses from a sleeping camp, and quite another to charge upon the same camp in daylight when all the young men are awake and armed and mounted. This fact the Crows were soon to have rammed home to them. But at first the Hunkpapa attack, made by two separate groups of men, was not effective. The Crows gave ground slowly, retreating toward Cedar Creek.

One of these Crows, finding himself hard pressed, turned back to stand them off. But Swift Hawk swooped upon him and, reining up his pony, knocked him out of the saddle and killed him. At his heels rode Little Elk, Chief Running Antelope and Chasing Crow, counting their *coups* in turn. The Sioux warriors rode down the field like a polo team, one behind another, club or lance in hand. This Crow, the first to fall, had a lump on his neck, probably a goiter.

After he fell the other Crows began to run. Their leaders, Bird-Claw-Necklace and Bird-in-the-Ground, could not hold them. Bird-Claw-Necklace himself turned to fly, bringing up the rear. But as he plunged on toward the creek his horse stepped in a gopher hole, stumbled and threw him. Regaining his feet, he could see the Sioux close upon him.

Bow in hand, he reached quickly for his arrows. But the quiver was empty. In the excitement of the battle he had used them all, or perhaps they had fallen out while he was racing away. There he was, unhorsed, unarmed, and the yelling Hunkpapa were almost on top of him. He knew he had seen his last sunrise. Tears rolled down his cheeks and he wailed and cried like a woman.

The Hunkpapa sometimes spared a brave man, but they had no heart at all for a coward. Like an avalanche they were all over Bird-Claw-Necklace, and cut him down. Sitting Crow hit him first, then Knocks-Them-Down, Knife Chief and Two Eagles.

In this running fight, however, one brave Crow faced the Hunkpapa and stood them off. He rode back and forth on his war horse, with rifle ready, and nobody dared to go near him. Just then Jumping Bull, Sitting Bull's father, came riding along. He was now getting on, a fairly old man. His hair was streaked with gray and his legs and arms were a little shrunken. He was too old to be fighting hand-to-hand with a young man. But when he saw those Hunkpapa hanging back, afraid to jump that lone Crow, he showed a last flash of the fighting spirit which has made his family world famous. He spoke to the timid Hunkpapa.

"Leave that Crow to me," he said. "Last night I had a terrible toothache and I wished I was dead. Now my chance has come. I have longed for such a day."

At once the old man started for the Crow. When the Crow saw him coming he jumped off his horse and stood waiting. Jumping Bull, now also afoot, ran forward, an arrow on his bowstring. But before he could loose it the Crow shot him in the shoulder. The old man had to drop his bow. For all that, Jumping Bull did not stop. He was no woman. The wound did not delay him a moment. He ran to close quarters.

The Crow's gun was empty. He whipped out his butcher knife. Seeing this, Jumping Bull reached for his own knife. But the knife sheath had slipped around behind him. It lay flat on his back. His fumbling old fingers could

not find it and, before he could shift his belt and grab the hilt, the Crow was on him, stabbing the old man above the collarbone.

After that, Jumping Bull had no chance to recover his knife. The Crow grabbed him by his gray hair, stabbed him again and again in the breast and side. Still Jumping Bull struggled with bare hands against his strong adversary, while the spiritless Hunkpapa stood still and looked on.

Many-Horses, coming up just then, rushed forward to rescue the old man. But it was too late. Before he could get there, Jumping Bull sank to his knees. The Crow plunged his knife into the top of the old man's head, and he toppled over, snapping the knife blade as he fell. The Crow pushed him aside, mounted his horse and was gone.

Some one told Sitting Bull that his father was being killed, and he came racing on his black war horse. Too late. There lay his father, his withered limbs all awry, the broken knife blade sticking out of his skull, his gray hair wet with blood. And the Hunkpapa had let the man who had done this get clean away!

But Sitting Bull saw him going, took after him, overtook him, lanced him, killed him. Then, jumping from his horse, he whipped out his knife and cut the body of his enemy to pieces. His heart was hot that day.

After that, the Hunkpapa, angry and ashamed, charged the Crows, yelling like devils, and chased them thirty miles. Now at last their blood was up; they cared nothing for the odds against them. The sun shone hot on their bare, sweating bodies, their horses were all in a lather.

As the June day advanced, it grew hotter and hotter; six good horses died that morning from overheating. But ten Crows fell on the prairie, while the great ridge of Rainy Butte, with its abrupt end, cut the sky with a long, slanting stroke, like a broken knife blade.

PRETTY WEASEL killed the next Crow to fall. Thunder Hawk and White-Bordered-Tail counted their *coups* on him. The next Crow fell by the hand of Shoots-Walking, who also claimed the second *coup* before anybody else could get there. Gives-Goose and Little Tusk struck this enemy also. Red Feather counted two *coups* in this fight, and others were garnered by No-Neck, Chief Loud-Voiced-Hawk, Grindstone and Running Against. Crawler, Gall, Two Bears, Red Fox, Brown Thunder and Lame Deer were also active in this battle.

Sitting Bull, thirsting for the blood of those who had killed his father, pursued them so closely and fought so recklessly that at last his friends compelled him to turn back, saying that the danger was too great. Two Hunkpapa had already been killed: Makes-the-Enemy (father of Francis Fast Horse) and Running-Close, who was dying of his wounds. At the end of thirty miles the Sioux turned back, worn out, riding their heaving, lathered ponies.

When the Crow warriors fled, they left behind them three women and a baby boy. The boy rode in his cradle, slung from the tall horn of his mother's rawhide saddle. When the women saw that they were cut off from their husbands they made for the creek and tried to get away.

Feather Mane was the first of the Sioux to see them. He let out a yell and raced to count the *coup*. White Blackbird and Chief White Buffalo were right on his heels; Cloud Shield was fourth. All these struck the first woman they came to. The second woman, running away as fast as she could, was struck by Magpie Eagle, Bear Tooth (sometimes called Dry Bones), Feather Mane and White Blackbird. Four others claimed these women as captives. The first woman was claimed by Water Carrier, the second by Looking Elk (Moses Old Bull's grand-uncle), and the third by Long Horns. Old Crow took the baby

boy, cradle and all.

The men who owned the captives were very bitter about the killing of Sitting Bull's father. They determined to kill the captive women and the child.

Pretty soon Sitting Bull came through the camps, wailing and crying for his father. Tears streamed down his face, his hair was loose in mourning, and he had thrown away his comfortable clothing and was wearing old rags and was barefoot. The Hunkpapa stood watching him, indignant and full of sympathy, almost ready to cry themselves. Sitting Bull was their friend, everybody liked him, and it cut them to the heart to see his distress. They were more determined than ever to destroy those captives.

Sitting Bull came and stood before his people. He had heard about these captives and suspected what they were thinking.

"If you have hidden these captives for my sake, it is not right," he said. "Treat them well and let them live. My father was a man and death is his."

Sitting Bull knew that these women had lost husbands and brothers in this fight, that they were lonesome and grief stricken. He felt as they did; he knew exactly how they felt. And so he took pity on them, since they were women.

Jumping Bull was buried with the other dead Sioux on the north bank of Cedar Creek, where the ridge and the butte make a valley, no very great way from the town of Lemmon, South Dakota.

When four days of mourning had elapsed, Sitting Bull gave permission to hold a victory dance over the Crows they had killed. A special song was composed for this dance of triumph, and because the Crow leader, Bird-Claw-Necklace, had wept and wailed like a woman, the black-face warriors and their women stamped and sidled all night long to the taunting chorus: *"Crows cried! Crows cried!"*

At the end of Summer, Swift Bull, Carries-the-Prairie-Chicken and Wide Skirt brought horses and took the Crow captives home again. The Sioux gave these women a number of good horses, in fulfillment of Sitting Bull's wish, when they went away. No doubt these Crow women had many romantic tales to tell when they returned from their pleasant captivity in the Hunkpapa camp.

DURING the Winter-when-the-Warbonnet-was-Torn, 1856, the Hunkpapa needed horses. The best horses came from Texas and Mexico, stolen by the Comanches, and passed northward by way of their relatives, the Utes and Shoshoni, or other tribes nearer the Rockies. There were no horses worth mentioning east of the Missouri River, for that river was too great a barrier to fleeing horsethieves. Of course, the Sioux raised few horses; their Winters were too severe. The best way to get them was to trade for them or steal them from enemies. Stealing them was a better bargain, as glory was thrown in. Accordingly, that Winter the Hunkpapa decided to go west and try to take horses from the Crows. The best horses were always to the west and south.

Nearly a hundred Hunkpapa went on this warpath. The camp was then on a small stream, a tributary of the Yellowstone, between the Box Elder and Powder Rivers. Moving up the Yellowstone, they looked for enemy camps where they might take horses. Most of the party were on foot, carrying lariats and empty saddle pads, which could be stuffed with grass when they captured horses. When they reached the Crow country they asked Sun-Dreamer, their shaman, to prophesy.

Sun-Dreamer was the greatest shaman ever known to the Hunkpapa. Many stories are told of his wonderful power to foretell the future, or bring buffalo. He could do anything; his power was marvelous. When the Hunkpapa leaders asked him to try to divine what luck they were going to have, he agreed. He smoked and sang and, when he was

through making mystery, found that the palm of his hand had turned black. This he interpreted to mean that they would meet enemies within one day.

Soon after, the scouts brought news of the Crow village which was nearby, on Porcupine Creek, north of the Yellowstone. The Hunkpapa immediately made preparations for a fight, but kept hidden until night.

Sitting Bull had recently been promoted to be one of the two sash-wearers of the Strong Hearts. These sash-wearers were entitled to wear a close fitting cap or bonnet covered thickly with crow feathers clipped short, and having two black buffalo horns, shaved thin as paper knives, one over each ear. From between these horns a lot of ermine streamers trailed down the wearer's back.

Sitting Bull also wore the picket rope, or sash, of his office. That was a strip of scarlet woolen cloth about a foot wide, slit to pass over his shoulder near one end, and long enough to drag on the ground. It was decorated with feathers. The sash-wearers were supposed to stake themselves to the ground by sticking a lance or a picket pin through the tail of their sashes, so that they could not leave their post. Only a comrade could release them. They were under a vow never to retreat, once they had taken their stand, until they had been victorious.

Sitting Bull carried his shield. Instead of his trusty lance or bow, he was armed with a new and prized weapon—a muzzle loading smooth bore gun, bought from the traders. He rode a fast black horse with white face and stockings, a present from his brother-in-law, Makes Room. Its bridle was adorned with a "scalp" made of a horse tail and painted red and black, a badge showing that this horse had been used to run down an enemy.

Having put on this regalia and taken his shield from its case, Sitting Bull was ready to go with his comrades into the Crow camp and run off the horses. Certain men were chosen to do this, and after a long time they came back driving a great herd of horses through the darkness. These were divided among the young men. Some got one horse, some two. They got the horses away from the camp without a fight, and struck out for home, pushing the herd ahead of them. Some of the men rode point on the herd, others on the flanks, while the main body followed behind, prepared to fight off their pursuers. It was pretty certain that they would be pursued, for the Crows had a big camp and plenty of horses were left in it.

Just after sunrise there came thundering up the valley a great horde of enemies, charging on the trail of the running Hunkpapa. The Hunkpapa were hampered by their captured herd and could not run away. The Crows were gaining and, though the Hunkpapa rode hard, they could not avoid a battle. The leader ordered some of the young men to bunch the herd and hold it while the rest of them stood off the Crows. They had not long to wait. The enemy was just over the next rise.

All at once the skyline sprouted lances, tossing like long grass blades against the sky, then black-and-white war bonnets, the heads of horses, naked painted warriors. They rushed over the brow of the hill like water through a spillway. The charge was on. Here they came, slapping their open mouths to make the pulsating, terrible war cry.

"*Yip, yip, yi-ip!*" they yelled. And puffed through loosely closed lips, like angry buffaloes, "*Ploo! Ploo!*"

But when they saw the Hunkpapa line up to receive their charge, the main body slowed up, then halted. Only the leaders, three brave men, came on, widely separated, full of fight, making for the Hunkpapa line. One of these charged right in among the Sioux, counted two *coups* and turned to make his getaway. But Loud Bear snatched the man's war bonnet by its long tail, which came away in his hand. This unusual occurrence gave its name to the

year in the Hunkpapa picture calendar.

The second Crow charged and killed a Hunkpapa, Paints Brown. Sitting Bull rode forward to confront the third.

When he was well out in front of his own line, Sitting Bull jumped off his horse, gave it a slap on the rump that started it back to the Hunkpapa and turned to face the enemy.

"Come on!" he yelled. "I will fight you. I am Sitting Bull."

The Crow did not wait for a second invitation. He ran forward afoot, and Sitting Bull ran to meet him. As he ran forward he saw that the Crow wore a red shirt trimmed with ermine, the insignia of a chief. The Crow carried a powder horn and a flintlock gun. Both men had knives in their belts.

But as the Crow saw Sitting Bull coming with his gun in hand and his shield before him, saw that trailing sash and that horned bonnet, of which he well knew the meaning, his heart was not so strong as it had been. He knew that his opponent must be a very brave man to wear those things.

And he knew that Sitting Bull meant fight, for he was singing a Strong Heart song:

> "Comrades, whoever runs away, he is a woman, they say;
> Therefore, through many trials, my life is short!"

Sitting Bull ran forward, faster than he ever ran again. He had only one shot in his muzzle loader, and he intended to make it count. Very few of the Hunkpapa had guns in those days, and Sitting Bull was not yet the crack-shot he afterward became. He ran right up to the Crow.

When the Crow saw his enemy so near he threw up his gun to shoot. Sitting Bull instantly dropped upon one knee, threw his shield before him and took aim at the Crow. The Crow fired first. Sitting Bull felt his shield jump as the ball pierced it, felt the jolt and the pang of the wound it made in his left foot. The Crow was blotted from sight by the white smoke, but not before Sitting Bull had taken aim and pulled the trigger. He saw his enemy leap into the air and fall mortally wounded, shot through the body. Sitting Bull jerked his long knife from its scabbard and, limping forward, plunged it into the heart of the Crow chief.

The fall of their leader struck terror to the Crows, who retreated. Immediately some of the Hunkpapa charged. Long Horn counted the second *coup* on the man Sitting Bull had killed, Many Sacks the third. The men who counted *coup* on the Crow whose war bonnet was torn were Loud Bear, Spotted Weasel, Thrown-on-Ground and Red Fox (sometimes called Rattles). Scatters-Them, Running Hawk and Wooden Gun struck the third Crow.

HAVING fulfilled his vow by killing an enemy, Sitting Bull turned back, caught his horse and rode off with the others. The bullet of the Crow chief had struck his left foot just beneath the toes and ploughed its way straight back through the sole to the heel. It is known that this wound was treated with a medicine obtained from the Rees. Whoever treated the wound made a botch of it, for when it healed the sole of the foot contracted, and from that day Sitting Bull walked with a perceptible limp. The Hunkpapa never forgot his brave deed. How could they? Every time he took a step his limp reminded them of the courage he had displayed in defending his comrades.

When the war party got back to camp they mourned for Paints Brown four days and then asked permission from his relatives to hold a victory dance. This was granted, and there was a great celebration. Sitting Bull gave away the horses he had taken, but was unable to dance because of his wound.

The Strong-Hearts proposed to do great honor to their champion. Among them was a smaller club or society of picked young men known as the Mid-

night Strong-Hearts. Whether they were so called because they met at night, or because they did their dirty work then, is not known. But they were the cream of the Strong-Hearts, and they made Sitting Bull their leader.

He was now in command of the most powerful order in the Hunkpapa tribe, a headman in his band, the Icira (which was amalgamated with the Bad Bows), a protégé of Chief Four Horns and the most distinguished of the Brave Alones. His election to be chief of the Hunkpapa, soldier chief, and commander-in-chief of all the non-agency Sioux followed in due time almost as a matter of course.

There is one strange thing about this single combat with the Crow Chief which no one can explain.

The Hunkpapa made their shields round. They say that the sun is round, the moon is round, the earth is round, the sky is round like a bowl. So is the stem of everything that grows from the ground, and the body of everything that breathes. In fact, everything in the world is round—except the rock. There is no straight line in nature. Therefore it is clear that Wakan Tanka likes round things; the circle is sacred. And so they make their teepees round and pitch them in a circle. Round shields protected them better, they say.

Now there is no doubt that round shields did protect them better than those of other shapes, for the simple reason that a round object attracts the eye and, when a man is shooting, is likely to attract his aim also. It was a great advantage to have a shield which attracted enemy arrows—which could not pierce it.

But when firearms came into use—what a change! The shield attracted bullets also, just as it had arrows, and the shield could not stop the bullets! After the Indians had the thing all worked out, along came the white men and upset the applecart. Firearms put a terriffic strain upon the science, or art, of the Sioux shaman.

Now, as a rule, when a man's shield, or other war charm (*wo-tá-we*) failed to protect him, he simply threw it away and got another, either in a dream, or by purchase. The Sioux warrior wanted results. If his shield failed him, he threw it away. But Sitting Bull, although his shield had been pierced by a bullet, had allowed him to be wounded, crippled in fact, kept it—kept it until long after his surrender, when wars were at an end. This is something strange and unaccountable, which no one can explain . . .

The importance of this single combat was very great in Sitting Bull's life. When the Sioux wish to say a thing is excellent of its kind, they say it is *sha*: red. The killing of the Crow chief, that was *sha-sha*: very red! A hundred Hunkpapa were witnesses to Sitting Bull's single handed courage, to his success; and among Indians nothing succeeds like success.

The next year, on Heart River, Sitting Bull was made chief of the Strong Hearts as a result of this deed.

The second article of the series, "Sitting Bull and Custer's Last Stand," will appear in the next issue.

Concluding

GLENALLAN *of the* CLANS

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

YOUNG MALCOLM, Laird of Glenallan, had contracted a duel for the following morning with the insulting Englishman, Captain Fitzstephen of the Dragoons, when word was whispered him in the gambling rooms at Martin's that he must return to the Highlands—that Prince Charles had come back to Scotland to lead the clans against the usurper of his throne, the German king, George II. And Malcolm, who placed duty to his regent above personal honor, could not wait for the morrow. He left the gambling house immediately, branded a coward.

On the way to his rooms he was attacked by highwaymen, but dispersed them with the timely aid of the escort of the beautiful Lady Helen Hornsby. Her alone he told that he was leaving London that night—and she replied that she herself would soon be visiting in Edinburgh.

The clans rallied, and Edinburgh quickly fell before their swift and unex-

pected onslaught. Quartered in the city, Malcolm became a regular caller upon Lady Helen. And the day that Prince Charlie led his Scotsmen out of the city, pointing over the long road to London, Malcolm and Lady Helen were married.

For a time the clans were successful, and in a fierce battle with the English General Hawley's army, Malcolm took his enemy, Captain Fitzstephen, prisoner. Burning to avenge the insult he had suffered in London, Malcolm immediately prepared to fight the delayed duel; but on the eve of the encounter Fitzstephen murdered one of Malcolm's aged retainers and escaped, leaving a derisive note behind . . .

Painfully fighting their way back into Scotland, after heavy losses and desertions had decimated their ranks, the clans were fallen upon at Culloden by the magnificent army of the Duke of Cumberland. Hopelessly outnumbered, the clans fought fiercely, only to be routed completely. And in the terrific carnage Malcolm fell.

His unconscious body was found by an old woman, one time in the service of his family. She secretly removed the young laird to her hovel on the outskirts of Inverness—and a short time later Lady Helen came to the squalid little town, seeking Malcolm. By great good luck the old woman discovered Lady Helen wandering the streets, and took her to her husband. And thereafter, until he was strong enough to travel, the two women nursed Malcolm night and day.

Lady Helen was determined not to be parted from Malcolm again and, despite his protests, she accompanied him overland to Glenallan, where Malcolm feared harm had come to his young brother Fergus, whom he had left behind.

The journey was a terrible ordeal for Lady Helen, but she was courageous; and early one morning they came to the head of the glen. Malcolm left her for a moment, and when she crept to his side she found him staring wildly at the castle.

"You stay here," he said. "Keep back of these rocks."

"You'll be careful, Malcolm?"

"Aye. Stay here."

HE PUSHED her gently behind the rocks. He unhooked the pistols from his belt, examined the priming with his finger, but without looking at it, and cocked both weapons. He had never taken his gaze from the castle.

Helen saw him stride down the hill, the pistols held in front of him. It was only a few hundred yards to the castle gates. Once there had been a drawbridge over the moat, but now there were only two beams of iron without any planking between them. But the moat was dry—filled with rocks and sticks and rubbish, and Malcolm made his way across it without difficulty. He disappeared into the castle, swallowed by the tremendous shadow of the doorway.

On the hill, Helen waited for a long time, trembling. She knew that something horrible had happened, and she wanted to go to her husband and try to comfort him, but she was afraid to move. But after a long time she came to be more afraid to stay where she was. Malcolm did not reappear, and she was wildly fearing that he was dead. He had walked so silently, in a manner so ghost-like, into that yawning black shadow—the blank emptiness of the place had engulfed him, removed him from the earth. Not a sound came to Helen; and even though the mist lifted, and she strained her eyes, she could see no sign of Malcolm at any of the narrow, fortress-like windows.

He had told her to remain on the hill; but she could endure this no longer. She rose to her feet, came from behind the rocks, and moved slowly, very slowly, down the hill. Sometimes she stumbled, for she did not look where she was walking and the ground was rocky and rough. She could not take her eyes from the square of blackness that was the castle door.

The drawbridge, she saw as she ap-

proached it, had been burned; the iron beams were twisted and blackened. The door itself had been burned too, or partially burned. What planks were left were blackened, splintered and awry, forming no door at all. It required every bit of Helen's courage—more courage than she ever supposed she possessed—to pass through that doorway and into the blackness beyond. It went against every instinct; every nerve in her body, and every muscle, rebelled. Still, she went in.

At first she could see nothing at all, but she was instantly aware of a heavy, sickening stench. It was like walking into a tomb that had been stricken by lightning and forced to disgorge its contents. So horrible was the odor, and so strong, that for a moment she almost swooned. She swayed, gasping.

There were, she knew, stones all around her. The ceiling was low, the stone floor strewn with rubbish. Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and she perceived that she was in a long, blank corridor, a medieval sort of passageway with no attempt at decoration. She could not see how it ended; in front of her the darkness was complete, unmitigated.

She was standing there, wondering whether to go on, wondering what to do, when a sound reached her that chilled and stiffened the skin all over her body. It was the faraway, muffled sound of a man sobbing. It rose and fell softly, somewhere in front of her, somewhere in the recesses of the dark castle.

It was Malcolm! She was convinced of it. And she was convinced, too, that she must go to him and comfort him. She started to run, not toward the doorway but away from it. She stumbled and slid upon stones and empty bottles with which the floor was littered. She bumped a wall, felt along it, found a doorway, entered that and found herself in another passageway, somewhat lower and somewhat lighter than the entrance corridor. Along this she ran, trying to call out, trying to shout reassurance to Malcolm that she was coming—but she could not find her voice, and her throat was dry and tight.

She paused at the end of this passageway, listening. The sobbing was behind her now, and a little to the right. She retraced her steps, running. She tried one door; it led into a square, bare room. She tried another door—and found herself abruptly in the great hall of Allan's Castle.

There was more light in the great hall, but even there it was dim enough. It was a huge chamber, much bigger than Helen would have supposed the castle could possibly contain. What furniture it had once held had apparently been swept into the enormous fireplace at the far end, where an attempt had been made to burn it. Helen saw stumps of chairs, bits of what had probably been a huge table, blackened corners of old wall hangings, and a vast amount of broken and blackened glassware. The fire must have been a big one, for the walls all around the fireplace were blackened. Above the fireplace, carved in the rough stone, had been a crude escutcheon of some sort; but this had recently been crushed and broken, and bits of the smashed stone lay upon the floor.

But what caught and held Helen's gaze was a group of dim, huddled figures on the floor to the left of the fireplace—grotesque, twisted figures. And by the side of one of them, his face in his hands, was Malcolm MacIldowie of Glenallan, crying like a woman.

She went to him, put a hand on his shoulder. He was not offended. He covered the thing at his side quickly with a remnant of tartan blanket, but she had seen it. She had seen other, similar things around it. From the far side of the chamber they had not looked so horrible; but now, close to them, she was truly sick. Malcolm rose quietly, put his arm around her, and without a word of reproach led her back through the two corridors and to the doorway. It was wonderful to breathe clean air again. She was exhausted, choking, sick.

"Go back where you were, Eilidh. I'll come to you soon. I must put him away decently first."

"Was it—was it—"

"It was bonnie Fergus," he said, very quietly. There was no expression on his face. His eyes were red, but his features were set as firmly as though they had congealed. His voice was gentle, firm. "Go back there. I'll come soon."

She walked away without another word, and Malcolm returned to the dark of the castle. From the hillside Helen watched him carry out his brother's corpse — watched him dig a pitifully shallow grave by the edge of the loch, using the only tool available, his dirk—watched him bury what had been Fergus MacIldowie of Glenallan. He was quiet about it, steady, well contained. He did not look around him; he wasted no time; and when the job was finished he did not even pause for a last look at the miserable little pile, but wiped his dirk and replaced it in its sheath, and then came directly to her on the hill.

"Let's get away from here."

"Was there—was there nobody left, Malcolm?"

"Nobody at all," said Malcolm. "Let's get away."

He did not once turn his head as they quit the place, but Helen could not resist peeking over her shoulder. Glen Allan was utterly still, utterly desolate, like a valley on the moon, silent, lifeless. Not even a dog prowled among the blackened ruins of the huts. Not even a bird circled overhead.

CHAPTER XXII

THE OUTLAWED

FOR many hours after that they walked in silence; Malcolm ahead carrying their belongings, Lady Helen stumbling behind. She wanted to speak to him, but she did not know what to say; she suspected that he would resent an attempt to comfort him. He walked with his head down, but he was watchful; he walked slowly. And when twilight was coming, and they were at one end of a narrow glen, about to start over a wooded rise of ground, he paused suddenly. Helen could hear no sound, and she could see nothing more alarming than the long gray shadows that were beginning to stretch themselves across the hillsides, and the trees and heather and rocks.

Perhaps Malcolm could see nothing, either. But he sensed something. Sometimes he seemed to have the instincts of a jungle beast, or of a hunting dog. He was stiff and alert.

"What is it, dear?"

He shook his head, but did not answer. For a little time his dark eyes darted back and forth; he was searching the shadows, which were perfectly still. Then slowly he unhooked the pistols from his belt, and held them, one in each hand, and cocked them with his thumbs. He walked slowly backward, motioning her back with an elbow, but never turning his head, never taking his gaze from the mottled, mysterious hillside.

At a tree they paused, and he pushed her behind it. There he waited, pistols ready. And she too waited, with a wildly beating heart.

For perhaps two minutes nothing whatever happened; there was no sound or movement. Then from the shadows came a voice—a harsh voice—calling some challenge in Gaelic.

"I do no' ken ye while ye're hid," Malcolm replied calmly. "Stand up, if ye be no coward."

There was a murmur of talk, and not one but four men rose from their places of concealment. They had been hiding behind some rocks and heather, startlingly close at hand.

They were a ferocious-looking quartet, each with a musket pointed at Malcolm. Lady Helen gave a little gasp, but Malcolm did not stir. Malcolm, his own pistols held in readiness, called again.

"I wish a look at ye!"

He walked, undismayed, directly toward the four muskets. Utter fear-

lessness was his best protection at the moment, and he knew it; if he showed any fright they might shoot him down.

He came close to the first man, the man who had spoken—a monstrously tall fellow dressed in the Highland kilt and philibeg, with a red bonnet and moloch brogues, but no stockings; he carried, in addition to the musket, a pistol, a broadsword, and three or four knives; his black hair hung thick and matted around his shoulders, and it looked as though it had never been touched by a comb; and his black beard fell upon a huge chest.

Malcolm stared at him for some time through the gathering gloom. The two men were not more than a few feet apart.

Then Malcolm said—

"You are Patrick Grant."

The man did not answer.

"They call you Black Peter of Caskie," said Malcolm. "I have been looking for you."

"Ye've found me," the big man offered. He did not move.

"I want you to tell me where a certain person is hiding."

"It's a lot ye ask. There's no reason I ken why I should no' kill ye an' be done wi' it."

Malcolm frowned impatiently.

"Daftie! Do ye no' ken it's Glenallan talks to ye?"

The big fellow started. He peered forward to get a closer look: he put his face almost against Malcolm's face, staring suspiciously. Then he became suddenly obsequious.

"Forgive me, MacDomhnull Dhu. I did no' ken it was you."

They had been speaking in Gaelic, and Lady Helen, crouching behind her tree, did not understand a word of it. Now Malcolm returned to her side, hooking his pistols on his belt again. The four men had lowered their muskets.

"These are loyal men," Malcolm told his wife. "I heard of them through Jennie. They are called the Seven Men of Glenmoriston, and they don't mean to submit to the redcoats. They don't consider the war finished yet, and they're still fighting—in their own way."

"They are—outlaws?"

"Aye." And Malcolm smiled grimly. "Outside of the Prince himself there's nobody Hawley would rather catch than this Black Peter. But he'll tell us where the Prince is hidden. We'll go with them."

She was apprehensive: she did not like the appearance of these men. But she said nothing. They followed Patrick Grant and his three companions for about a mile, striking off over a hill to the left.

It was utterly dark, and raining a little, when they came to the mouth of the cave. A tiny opening it was, and Lady Helen would never have suspected, even if she had seen it in the daytime, that it led to any place of habitation; it seemed no more than a small crack in the rocks, half hidden by the heather which was thick about it.

Somebody called a low challenge as they approached, but Patrick Grant only grunted in response. They could not see the challenger, but soon something behind the rocks was moved, and a dim light showed through.

"If the lady will get down on her knees—"

She hesitated, looking at Malcolm. But he nodded reassuringly.

"Go in, Eilidh. I'll follow you."

She crept through the tiny opening. She had to kneel very low, and before she reached the cave proper she had to get down on her stomach and crawl for a few feet.

Then the narrow tunnel widened abruptly, and she found herself in a large, low chamber of rock lit by a bog pine torch which flickered weirdly at the other end. Directly through the center of this chamber flowed quietly a clear, cold stream of water. The torch was thrust into a crack in the rock wall, and the only furniture was a three legged stool. There was a heap of blankets in one corner, and everywhere there were weapons—many

claymores, cavalry sabers, muskets, targets, knives of all sorts.

THREE men were squatting under the torch. They rose when she entered, and stared foolishly at her, blinking as though they could not believe their eyes. They did not speak. But when Malcolm came out of the tunnel and got to his feet, standing as straight as the low ceiling would permit, one of these men gave a cry of recognition, saluting him.

"Do ye no' ken me, MacDomhnull Dhu?"

"Aye," said Malcolm. "You're a Lochaber man from the other side of Lochiel."

Thereafter he spoke only to Lady Helen and to Patrick Grant; and his manner in treating with the leader of the band was cold, haughty. Yet all these men, like the other commoners they had encountered in their trip across the hills, treated him with an extravagant awe.

He had no money, no followers or servants, no official position; he was an outcast like them, a man who could expect nothing better than a halter if he were captured by the soldiers who infested this countryside; but he was a descendant of Donald the Black, and this fact made all the difference in the world to Highlanders of every degree. Lady Helen, seeing him in his own country, understood better why it was he had been so cold and arrogant when he dealt with other men down in London. He was accustomed to being treated as a little king. He expected it, took it for granted.

They washed in the stream, which was very cold, and dried themselves before a fire one of the men kindled on the rock floor. Evidently there was an opening of some sort in the back of the cave, for there was a continuous, chilly draft, and most of the smoke was carried out promptly through the entrance tunnel. The outlaws did not approach the fire until Malcolm and his bride had dried themselves thoroughly. Then they served minced collops with butter, oatmeal with brandy, and some main bread. Patrick Grant apologized for the meal. If he had known they were coming, he protested, he would have arranged for venison and partridge and shortbread. But he was pleased to be able to offer them some good wine.

The wine was more than just good—it was amazing. There was muscatel, the best Lady Helen had ever tasted, and some excellent sack. Sick of brandy and whisky, which she had never liked, she was delighted. The wine warmed her more than the fire, and it made her sleepy.

"Where do you suppose they got it?" she whispered.

Malcolm grinned.

"Where they get everything else they need. The German's officers," he explained, "like to live well, even when they're stationed up here in the hills."

"But how could they buy wine from such men?"

"They don't buy it."

"You mean they *steal* it?" She was whispering still. The cave made whispering natural, for a raised voice set millions of eerie echoes into motion.

"They just go and take it," Malcolm explained.

"But they can't attack regular army forces!"

"If half of what I hear about them is true, these fellows can attack anything. When Charlie was here they had champagne for him."

"The Prince was here?"

"For three weeks. These men worship him."

She looked around the dim, strange place, looked at the bare walls over which the yellow light flickered erratically, and across the rough bare floor.

"An odd place for a prince," she remarked.

"He's been in many a worse since the fight at Drummosie muir."

"Is he near here now?"

"I'm going to ask that."

For some time, then, Malcolm talked

in a low voice, in Gaelic, with Patrick Grant; and Helen, unable to understand them, sipped her wine sleepily and watched the reflection of the tiny flames on the surface of the silent running stream which bisected this cavern. By staying against the far wall, she found, under the bog pine torch, it was possible to keep out of the chilly draft. Not all of the smoke escaped, but otherwise the air was fresh and sweet.

She was nodding, drowsy, when Malcolm returned to her.

"We'll stay here the night. In the morning I'm going out to join his Highness. He isn't far from here, but I can't take you to the place. Patrick Grant will get some horses in case his Highness needs them, and in the morning he'll take you to a hut near here where there's a woman named Maisie. Maisie will take good care of you, and I'll come to you in a few days—maybe with the Prince and maybe without him."

She was frightened again, and clung to him; she was no longer sleepy.

"I don't want you to go away without me!"

He put his arm around her and spoke gently, reassuringly.

"No harm will happen to either of us, lassie. It's the only thing we can do. A French ship's coming to Lochnanaugh, and we must be with the Prince when he escapes. We'll go to France with him and he'll get me a commission in the French army. MacIldowies," he added solemnly, "have fought for France in the past."

"But in this wild place—"

"Hush, lassie. Do you suppose I'd leave you if I thought any harm could come to you? Patrick Grant has kissed his dirk and sworn to protect you with his life, and a Glenallan lady is always safe with old Maisie."

"But why can't you go with me?"

He shook his head.

"I must go to the Prince,"

There was no arguing with Malcolm; she knew that. But for all the physical weariness she felt, she lay for many hours, tossing in a tartan blanket, before she could get any sleep that night. As she was stretching out, she saw two of the men quit the cave, after Patrick Grant had spoken to them. They were going to get some horses, Malcolm told her. There was a company of Dragoons stationed nearby.

CHAPTER XXIII

HIS HIGHNESS EXPLAINS

CHARLES EDWARD STUART sat in the back of the Cage, one hand indolently turning over and over a fish that was frying, while the other hand held a mug of claret. He had been drinking for two days, and neither hand was very steady.

At the table, bending low to spare their heads the scrape of the ceiling, were Cluny Macpherson of Cluny, Macpherson the Younger of Breakachie, the Reverend John Cameron, and a helot named Sandy. They were playing cards. Thirty-two guineas in silver were on the table; it was all the money that was left. From time to time it was distributed evenly again and the game restarted.

Malcolm sat with Donald of Lochiel at the doorway, gazing across a sweep of blackness which was fronted by a few vaguely looming pine trees and overhung with ten thousand silver pinpricks in a black sky. The smoke wandered lazily, teasingly past their faces, and the smell of fish was welcome. They had not eaten cooked food for two days, for until this night it had been deemed unsafe to light a fire in the Cage.

The Cage was a simple but effective place of refuge. Half cave and half house, originally it had been no more than a sizable hole in the side of a cliff, some twenty feet above the ground. A series of steps, some natural, some chipped into the rock, led up to it. The doorway was so cleverly constructed of tree branches and foliage indigenous to the cliffside itself, that only a man who was very close to it, or a man who on a

clear day was in search of just such a place, would be likely to observe it.

They were fighting Culloden over again.

"And if only the MacDonalds had charged—"

"Nay, it would have done no good, Callum. It would have been that many more brave laddies killed."

"*We* broke through!"

"How many of us?" Lochiel asked. "Nay, we were beaten before the battle started."

And Malcolm shook his head.

"Maybe you're right. Those damned Englishmen—"

Charles Edward interrupted, drawling:

"Glenallan, you're the most fervid English hater I have ever encountered. Tell me, why do you carry that old feeling so persistently? Can't you find anything good to say about Englishmen at all?"

Malcolm considered respectfully. Young Lochiel and the Prince waited, smiling. The Prince turned the fish over again, causing a great sputter in the pan and a shower of tiny, hot spicks.

"Nothing," Malcolm said at last.

And now Lochiel and the Prince both laughed aloud, so that the card players looked up from their game. Charles Edward swallowed the last of the wine and explained for their edification:

"Our gallant Glenallan has been denouncing the English again. He can think of nothing good to say about them—nothing at all." His Highness addressed himself to Malcolm, squinting through the smoke. "But surely you must concede that there were men of courage on the other side at Falkirk and at Culloden? Surely they were not *all* base?"

"Practically all," said Malcolm.

This was a subject which invariably excited the strongest feelings in him; and just now he was additionally irritated by the patronizing manner of the others.

"You don't understand, sir," he said. "I don't hate them just because they are English. I hate them—" He paused, embarrassed. He rose to his feet; but after bumping his head violently against the rock, he sat down again, with an angry abruptness. The Prince made some courteous remark: the others only smiled.

"You don't understand. I hate Saxons because they want to make the world just like themselves. I hate them because they think everything they do is right, and that God in heaven gave them special commands to do it just that way. They think everybody else must do it that way . . ."

Words were coming easier now, though he was not saying half he meant to say. He talked rapidly, motioning with his hands.

"We must all talk English. We must forget Gaelic. Gaelic is wrong because the Saxons don't understand it. We must give up the kilt because Englishmen don't wear kilts. We must not own muskets or pistols. We might shoot Englishmen with them. But we must not even shoot one another, because Englishmen don't do that!

"And they come to Scotland and tell us that. The Lowlanders listen—and do what they say. That's because the Englishmen have money, and the Lowlanders are like the Englishmen—they want money; and everything that prevents them from getting more of it they call indecent or dangerous or anything they want to call it, and they demand that it be abolished. And the Lowlanders listen to that and imitate them. Pass the bottle . . ."

He wanted to stride back and forth and wave his arms; he wanted to move his body in some way. But he remembered the ceiling. The claret wetted his mouth and felt good in his throat.

"It's more than that, too. The Saxons and all the others like them are killing everything I love. And they aren't even killing it out in the open. They just call it indecent, or uncivilized, and clink their money bags, and act high-and-

mighty—and those cursed Lowlanders listen to them and agree.

"They're *sensible,* that's it! The Englishmen, I mean. The Lowlanders, too. Everything they do must be *sensible.* To hear them talk you'd think that everybody who wasn't sensible was a loon or a knave!"

The Stuart offered:

"But surely, Glenallan, common sense is an excellent thing? I have even observed that you use it yourself on occasions."

"Aye, on occasions. But has your Highness ever observed me forcing it upon anybody else? Has your Highness ever seen me retreat to common sense when honor told me to move forward? No! And you have never done it yourself, sir. Was it common sense to meet them at Culloden, when we were so weak we could hardly draw claymores? But Scots will remember what we did as long as there are Scots. Even the Lowlanders, after they have counted their money for the day, and sneaked off to whimper their prayers to a Presbyterian God—they'll wish they could have done it themselves.

"Sir, was it sensible to march over the border with a few thousand men, and half of them with no guns and half of them barefooted? To march into England where trained troops were waiting for us, a dozen to one? For the matter of that, sir, was it sensible to start this business in the first place?"

"It was *right!*" Charles Edward himself was excited now. "I came to take back what had been stolen from me and from my family. It was the right thing to do!"

"Aye," said Malcolm, cooler now, "and that's why we did it. Look at Lochiel, here. He's been smiling at me, thinking how daft I am and pretending to be calm and hard headed himself. But didn't he know when he summoned his clansmen—didn't he know that the chances were he'd get only death or poverty for reward? A year ago he was rich, and the most respected laird benorth the Tweed. What is he now? He's sneaking around the country, ducking behind a tree every time he hears a twig snap, without any money, without any servants—and him who used to have a tail of thirty gentlemen! His castle burned to the ground, and all his land taken from him, and looking for a ship to France . . . Yet he knew when he summoned his clan that the chances were ten to one against him." Malcolm faced his cousin. "You did, Donald. Admit it."

"Aye," said Young Lochiel, smiling. "I knew that."

MALCOLM waved both hands, triumphantly gesturing. John Cameron and the Macphersons nodded. Only Sandy was astonished; the confidence that Lochiel had seemed to possess during the campaign—a confidence affected for the purpose of encouraging his warriors—had appeared genuine to Sandy.

Malcolm indicated the Macphersons.

"Did Cluny think he was going to come out alive, when he pledged his clan to your Highness's service? But it was the *right* thing to do, it was honorable. So he walked into the war at the head of all his men, though he might have hung back and dickered for terms like Lovat, or refused outright, like the MacDonald of the Isles—damn his black soul! Was that sensible, what Cluny did?"

The Macpherson nodded, and his son smiled. Charles Edward was looking curiously at them.

The Macpherson said:

"I didn't believe, any more than Lochiel, that our arms would be victorious. But what else could I do? I couldn't disobey my king."

"The Campbells could," Malcolm cried. "And the Lowlanders! And the Saxons!"

But now Charles raised his hand.

"The gallant Glenallan," he said, "is surely to be listened to with respect when he speaks of honor, for he knows

what honor is. But he must permit me to insist that he is unjust when he condemns all Lowlanders and all Englishmen. You must remember, Sir Malcolm, that there were Lowlanders under our banner at Falkirk and at Culloden —yes, at Gladsmuir, too. They had left their homes. They had risked attainder and death. And they had no hills to retreat to; remember that. The hired soldiers of the usurper—"

Sandy interrupted—

"If your Highness please, sir, the fish is burning."

Charles laughed and took the pan from the fire.

"I hope I'll be a better king than cook," he said. "Do you remember Alfred and the cakes?"

In fact, he was an excellent cook—better even than Sandy, who had been in Lochiel's kitchen for many years. He frequently insisted upon preparing their meals, hot or cold, and took no small pride in his own ability. The fish, in spite of the burning, was a pleasant food, hot and savory. It was placed on a wooden trencher in the middle of the stone table, and they used their fingers for eating it, the Stuart himself dividing it equally among them.

After claret had washed this down, they returned to the conversation. Donald of Lochiel had his say.

"I think my cousin is right in many respects, but I must agree with your Highness that he has condemned Englishmen too sweepingly. The war was not really that. If your Highness will permit me to say it, I believe it was a war between those who were convinced that the rightful king should sit on the throne and exercise the powers that his fathers exercised, and those who were convinced that the farmers and merchants should make laws for gentlemen to obey. Perhaps the merchants are right. I don't think so."

"I can not agree entirely with either of you," said Charles Edward. "No, gentlemen. Since we are being frank tonight . . . It was not a war of Highlanders against the rest of the world, nor was it a war of those who had confidence in any family against those who dreaded to lose their new right. It was rather a war against a religion.

"Those soldiers under the German's banner were not fighting me. They were fighting the Holy Father in Rome—" the outcast crossed himself—"and they believed that his Holiness would dominate their lives and their politics if my father became the real king. No arguments, no promises, no written contracts or solemn vows, could make them think otherwise. They were blind in their hatred of the Romish church—believe me, gentlemen—and that was the reason why they opposed our gallant troops, and there was no other reason.

"I can not understand it!" he exclaimed passionately. "They call us of the church bigoted. They tell their neighbors, and their neighbors echo the nonsense. They cry that we would overpower the country and kill all other beliefs and burn all other churches, and that his Holiness would encourage this outrage and direct it."

There were tears in his eyes now, and he struck his knees vigorously with his hands as he talked.

"I can not understand it! If you gentlemen could only see the Holy Father . . . He is amiable and gracious, and so sweet in everything he does. But they paint him as a monster—they who have never even seen him, and who, when they meet anybody who *has* seen him, run away from that man as though he had a dread disease . . .

"This was never properly a matter of religion. What does it matter what I believe, or what my father believes? It is the same God, is it not? Why do men insist that their way of worshiping is the only way?"

"Because they are Englishmen!" cried Malcolm.

Charles Edward smiled, but it was a sad smile; and he shook his head sadly.

"No, Glenallan, for I have found that

horrid spirit everywhere. But I can not see what difference the belief makes in a king. If he be a good man and of good blood, he will be a good king, Catholic or Protestant. If he be a bad man, basely born and with no courage and spirit, then he will be a bad king, even though every subject in the land agree with his religious opinions. And yet, that was the principal cause of the war."

But Sandy and John Cameron had fallen asleep, their snores growing grand out of small preliminary wheezes. They all had to get up at dawn, for they had learned that the French ship really was waiting for Charles at Lochnanaugh, and they were to travel the following day to a hut where Lady Glenallan was waiting.

So, when the claret and fish were finished, his royal Highness Charles Edward Louis Philip Casimer Stuart, Prince Regent of England, Scotland and Ireland, Prince of Wales, Count of Albany, Baron of Renfrew, etc, etc, stretched himself upon a pile of peat that was his bed, wrapped himself in a dusty, torn blanket, and resigned himself to prompt slumber.

The Macphersons crawled under the table and lay down side by side, wrapped in their breacan. They too were soon sound asleep.

And Donald and Malcolm, left alone, sat by the entrance, talking quietly about this and that, while the easy night breeze fanned their faces, rustling the leaves of trees they could not see and bringing in a sweet, mild odor of pine needles and of sumac.

It was good to be with Donald again; it made Malcolm feel quieter, calmer. It was good, too, to know that Prince Charles at last was practically safe, after these many months of skulking, and that he himself and his bride would soon be aboard a vessel bound for another land, away from all the fuss and fighting.

They sat there until dawn, when they awakened the others.

CHAPTER XXIV

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

HELEN ran down the hill and went directly to him, taking his hands. Her own hands trembled, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I was so frightened, Malcolm!"

He shook his head, smiling. Lovingly, in an undertone, he chided her for having spoken to him before she addressed herself to the Prince and asked the royal permission to speak. She was apologetic, for she knew what importance he attached to these trifles.

"But how much longer must it be, Malcolm?"

"A very wee while, lassie. Cluny Macpherson and Donald and the others are going on now to Lochnanaugh where a ship's come to take us all away. His Highness and you and I will stay here tonight while the rest go ahead." He glanced toward the hut. "Has Maisie watched you well, lassie?"

"Oh, she's been wonderfully kind! She made me stay inside while she did all the work and all the watching. She said there was no MacIldowie could work while she had fingers on her hands."

The Stuart spoke.

"Gentlemen, shall we not have a dram together before you continue your hard journey? I observe that there are horses here, and we who remain will have an easier trip of it perhaps."

Awed, Maisie scurried back into the hut, to emerge a moment later with two bottles of whisky. There were no glasses. They drank to King James, to the captain of the waiting ship, and finally, at the suggestion of James's son, to Lady Glenallan. "The bravest wife ever a Scottish gentleman had . . . "

Then the others strode off down the hill and away, and the four who remained retired to the hut. The Stuart, confident that his troubles were soon to be ended, was in high spirits and insisted upon chatting. But he drank

also, and drank deeply, throughout the conversation; and in the afternoon, made thoughtful by the whisky, he lapsed into silence, giving Malcolm and his bride an opportunity for their own exchanges.

Very soon it was night. A partition divided the hut into two tiny rooms, and Maisie and Helen retired to the inner one, sharing the single bed in spite of the old woman's embarrassed protest. Charles, who had refused to take the bed at the expense of a lady, made himself comfortable on a pile of straw in the outer room, near the wall. And Malcolm slept on some peat at the doorway, a musket and two pistols by his side.

"Are you comfortable there, Glenallan?"

"As comfortable as I would be on a feather bed, Highness."

"But there's no need now for such precaution. Come over with me. I have plenty of room here."

"If your Highness please, it's safest to watch the door."

In the darkness Charles Edward shook his head. Before this he had found occasion to marvel at the intensity of this young man's devotion. To loyalty he was accustomed. Obedience he accepted as his natural right, for he was descended from more than a hundred kings. But the loyalty of Sir Malcolm of Glenallan, instead of flattering him, seemed sometimes almost to irritate him.

For Malcolm of Glenallan was fighting and starving and risking the life and honor of his bride and himself, for something more than a prince of the blood royal. There was more to his loyalty than the feeling of duty that a faithful subject should have; some ideal that was beyond and above the Stuart ideal—some awful force of egotism, perhaps, that made this young man stretch himself to heights of sacrifice that were scarcely human.

"I wonder," Charles Edward muttered in his thoughts, as he lay there in the darkness, "I wonder whether these men think that their families are nobler than any family? I wonder whether it's really their own ancestors who are leading them through all this fury?"

He never could understand these tall, somber chieftains. They were a race apart. They were so different from the French and Italians, and different too from the English. They did things in a different way and aimed at different ends. Behind their grave, dark faces must have been strange thoughts; inside their hearts they must harbor curious emotions.

They were up at daybreak. They had whisky and oatbread for breakfast. Maisie got permission to go out in search of berries, and soon she was lost in the woods at the foot of the hill. Malcolm tended the horses—at least, until Charles, impatient with his clumsiness, took the task from him and finished it properly.

"You were never made for a groom," the Prince told him.

"I hope not, sir."

LADY HELEN watched with a smile. She often wished that her husband knew more about horses and could ride better. She could not be rid of the old conviction that he is not a perfect gentleman who is not a perfect horseman; and one of the things she most admired about the Stuart was his superb seat in saddle.

They left the animals tethered in front of the hut, while Charles Edward and the Glenallan retired to the inner room to discuss, over another bottle, the question of whether it would be wiser to start for Lochnanaugh immediately or wait until night.

Lady Helen sat in the doorway, watching for the return of Maisie. It was one of those days that are rare in the Scottish Highlands—sunny, warm, almost enervating. Though the night was barely gone, there was not a trace

of mist on the hilltops, and the sky was clear and blue without clouds.

The sun made her think of France. Would she be in France soon? She wondered. Or would this mad adventure end in disaster? Would the Prince eventually be taken? She shuddered to think of what Malcolm might do if this were to happen. Malcolm would become a maniac, and try to storm the prison single handed and put to rout the whole British army with his one heavy sword. Sometimes, Helen reflected tenderly, Malcolm's spirit held just a hint of the ridiculous, like an old legend that everybody loves but nobody really believes; but always it was admirable, and often it was magnificent.

And the thing that made one marvel, suppressing superior smiles that came too quickly, was the realization that, after all, he was a crack shot, an expert swordsman, a seasoned soldier and a wise and prudent leader of men. For all his high flown ideas, for all his old fashioned chivalry, he could fight with the best of them, and he could think in an emergency, and act. Indeed, he seemed to think clearest and act best in times of danger. He was a most extraordinary combination of contradictory qualities.

A red deer emerged from the bushes that surrounded the clearing below, gazed at her for a full minute, all unafraid, and then browsed deliberately, finally wandering away. The sun rose slowly, reaching its fullness like a giant stretching.

Her dress needed mending again. For all the loving care she lavished upon it whenever she had an opportunity, this poor dress was forever getting torn. Her needle was in the back room. She rose with a sigh, for she felt uncommonly lazy there in the sunlight. She interrupted the two men, murmuring apologies.

"I only wanted this . . . Do sit down, your Highness. Positively, sir, you embarrass me with so much honor."

It was on her way back to her stool in the doorway that she stopped, suddenly wide awake; her eyes flushed with terror and grew very big; the needle and thread fell from her hand.

The ground that sloped away in front of the hut was, for a distance of about five hundred yards, bare of trees and high bushes. At the foot of the hill was a small clearing, broad but not deep, and beyond this were shady woods. Rocks were few, and the heather was not thick there.

The Lady of Glenallan saw a tall, broad shouldered man in scarlet and blue riding out of these woods. At his side clanked a heavy cavalry saber; his boots were bright in the sun; there was gold lace on his hat, and gold froggery on his breast. Immediately behind him came two other men, obviously lesser military officers, one on each side of the first figure; and behind them, riding in perfect order, with their carbines in the hollows of their right arms, were some twenty-five or thirty redcoats.

The leader seemed startled at sight of the hut. He reined his mount hastily. He signaled to the others; and they all retreated to the woods, like men who do not wish to be seen. And the peaceful sunshine beat upon that quiet spot as though no human being had ever been there.

CHAPTER XXV

PURSUIT

THE old woman's death was annoying. And Fitzstephen was the more angry because he had only himself to blame for it: it was he, as captain, who had ordered the soldiers to keep turning until she told them what they wanted to learn. But how did he know the hag was so feeble? To look at her, a man would think her as tough as any of these damned barbarians.

Now, with her gone, they were obliged to find the hut on her information. At the top of a hill, she had said,

with a cleared space in front. It was in this direction . . .

They rode slowly, Fitzstephen in the lead. And quite without warning he found himself riding out into a sort of clearing, a quiet spot where grass and heather shared the ground space with only a few rocks. Lieutenant Button and Lieutenant Harris had followed him out of the wood, one on either side. Fitzstephen wheeled about.

"This is the place. Damn it! Back—get back!"

Behind the protecting barrier of trees, they gazed with more care and laid plans for a cautious approach. The hill and the hut were perfectly still. Was the Young Pretender resigned to surrender? It did not seem probable. More likely, Fitzstephen told his fellow officers, some Highlanders were waiting up there, with muskets and swords and clubs, prepared to make one last desperate stand.

If this were indeed the case, they could shoot three or four men with ease before the hut was taken. There was no way to approach it under cover. On right and left were swampy grounds and rocks. To send a company around to the rear would require too much time. Besides, they did not know how many men might be in that hut; and if they split their forces they might be surprised by a sally. Presumably these fellows would be bold enough for anything; they all knew the gallows awaited them.

Still, there was nothing at all to indicate that the hut was occupied—nothing except two horses, two fine animals that looked somehow familiar to Fitzstephen, tethered in front. The door was open, but they could not see beyond that, for the hut was windowless.

The captain cursed the old woman again. It had been a piece of excellent luck, capturing her and forcing the secret from her. But she might have stayed alive long enough to guide them here and give them further details, so that they could advance with more discretion. As it was, how did they know they had not been seen? How did they know that the hillside, when they started up, would not become white with smoke from a dozen guns?

Captain Fitzstephen spoke suddenly, interrupting Button's suggestion that they hoist a white flag for parley.

"We've been here too long already. The hag said there was only one man guarding him. Well, he can expect a fight. The only thing to do is ride straight up the hill. You gentlemen will ride with me. All the men must follow."

Harris suggested:

"Why not dismount and walk it? Then at least we could crouch down."

"Yes," said Button. "Then we'd not be such good targets."

Fitzstephen shook his head.

"There are two horses in front up there. Suppose they try to hurry away? We'd be obliged to run back here, mount, and ride up the hill again after them."

So the troop started forward—none too rapidly at first, for the men were not eager to rush into a volley fired by an invisible enemy. Fitzstephen rattled his saber and turned in his saddle, urging them to hurry. Harris grabbed his shoulder.

"Look!"

Two figures had rushed out of the door of the hut, scarcely two hundred feet away now. One was in native Highland garb, with a sword at his side and pistols on his belt. The other wore a tattered blue coat and a yellow waistcoat and yellow breeches. The Highlander was tall and dark; the other was equally tall, but of light complexion and very handsome. On the breast of the second gleamed a bright Star of St. Andrew, the royal order of Scotland.

Fitzstephen shouted, half for joy, half in alarm.

"Get them! Get that first fellow; I want them *alive!*"

The first fellow, he with the decora-

tion, had mounted the farther horse. With one graceful leap he was in saddle. The Highlander, standing between his companion and the approaching redcoats, fired one of his pistols directly at them. Then he too mounted; and they both disappeared behind the hut.

The captain of Dragoons drew his saber as he rode, flourishing it over his head. He shouted at the top of his lungs.

"I want them *alive!*"

The ground behind the hut, unlike the ground in front, was rocky and treacherous. The Dragoons had a difficult time of it. One of them already had been pistoled by the Highlander. Two others were thrown when their mounts stepped into holes. But there were plenty left. They leaned forward, riding without regard for order or discipline, the best mounted and the boldest drawing ahead, the others falling back.

THE first fugitive, very straight in saddle and riding like a master, could be seen only intermittently through the leaves of the low boughed trees. The other, the Highlander, was nearer. The Highlander was having trouble with his horse; he rode awkwardly; but there was a pistol in his right hand, and he was obviously determined to do what he could to delay the pursuit.

They jumped a stream where the water was thrown high into the air when it hit the heavy stones and was broken into the finest rainbow spray. They crossed a little clearing, frightening a red deer. They rounded a high pile of gaunt brown rocks grouped fantastically. They started on another upgrade.

The pursuers were drawing out. Their captain, riding well ahead, still flourished his saber, but he had ceased to shout. A sergeant, a fellow named Peterson, was fully three lengths behind him, and after Peterson came Lieutenant Button and three others grouped close; Harris and the rest of the company were strung along in the back.

Fitzstephen had almost drawn alongside of the Highlander when the captain's horse stumbled and fell. Fitzstephen rolled off easily, sprang to his feet, and mounted again, the horse rising quickly from a mere bed of moss. It was done in two blinks of an eye. But it gave the fast riding Peterson a chance to get ahead. Peterson grabbed the Highlander's skirt, attempting to pull the fellow from his horse.

"*Ye damned Sassenach!*"

The second pistol was used well, Sergeant Peterson fell forward, then sidewise dropping; his right foot was still in the stirrup, and his body was dragged for fifty feet or more.

But Malcolm had fallen too; the marvel was that he had remained on the horse's back this long. He drew his claymore, rushing at Fitzstephen. The captain laughed and rode past. And Malcolm, frantic, turned to face the barrels of half a dozen carbines. It would be suicide to resist. He shrugged his shoulders, and dropped his sword, surrendering with an unexpected mildness.

"It's not the Glenallan you're wanting," he told them. "It's an easy thing, taking me. But let me see you catch the Prince!"

They bound him, under the direction of Harris, who was hopelessly out of the chase now. Button had not paused; nor, indeed, had any of the leaders. They were out of sight, and those who made the Highlander prisoner could only tell the direction of the chase by the sound of breaking twigs and branches and the occasional shouts of the captain.

Malcolm sneered.

"There's not a better rider in the world," he said proudly.

"He'll need wings to get away from Fitzstephen," Harris informed.

"Fitzstephen? Horace Fitzstephen of the Dragoons?"

"That is him, sir."

"So—" said Malcolm.

"You have met Captain Fitzstephen?"

Malcolm did not answer. The German's officers, certainly mere lieutenants were not for a MacIldowie to converse with. Besides, he had learned enough already.

Meanwhile, to the south, the chase continued. Fitzstephen reflected as he rode that it was very like a hunt. But what a fox! A golden beast! Fitzstephen believed that he should be able to get at least twenty thousand of the reward, perhaps more. He wondered whether that barbarian had managed to account for Harris with his two edged sword. He hoped so. Harris was an amiable fellow; but the fewer there were left, the better for the captain.

In any event, there would be the honor of the thing, which itself should be profitable to a man who took proper advantage of it. London would worship him. His credit, for a time, would be without limit . . . He dug the spurs in, straining forward.

The fugitive was not in sight, but Fitzstephen could hear the hoofbeats just ahead.

"Ride, you Roman devil!" he screamed. "Ride like the fiend, but you'll not get away from me!"

For some time they had been going up. They seemed to have no particular course. Neither knew the countryside.

They came to a rocky place. On the right and on the left there were precipitous slopes. In front was a deep, sharp ravine, with a brook at the bottom. Down into this they went, over the brook, up the other side, all without pause.

But now there was a trap. The ground fell away suddenly, in a slope too sharp for descent. Right and left were the rocks. There was, on the left, a deep gorge, and on the other side more rocks. The gorge was the only possible avenue of escape. A good horse, if it were fresh, might be able to jump it; but to miss it meant death.

The fugitive tried. The animal balked at the edge, wheeled, tried again. But Captain Fitzstephen was out of the ravine by now and grabbed the blue coat just as the horse got its courage to spring. The horse failed, and fell to the rocks below with a great crashing of branches and banging of rocks. But the rider, pulled off, was saved.

Fitzstephen held a cocked pistol.

"Sir, you are my prisoner."

In the flight, the fugitive's hat had fallen off. In the tumble, the wig followed. And there was displayed to the captain's startled gaze a great mass of beautiful light brown hair, waist-long and very wavy. The captain saw also a pair of large blue eyes, a little mouth that exertion had opened, and a tiny chin.

"By the foul fiend!"

"It—it was—a good ride—while it lasted, Captain!"

He sprang from his horse and grabbed her by the shoulder, shaking her.

"Where's the Pretender! Tell me!"

"The Prince?" panted the Lady of Glenallan, who was seated asprawl at the very edge of the precipice.

"Oh, he walked away—while you chased—us!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CAT

MALCOLM sat cross legged on the stone floor, watching Captain Fitzstephen. Fitzstephen stood in the center of this dungeon; and next to him was Lieutenant Harris, a thick faced, rather timorous fellow. A grinning turnkey loitered near the door.

Malcolm, in the past, had been a guest at this very castle—a guest of the owner, a cousin, who was now in France. But Malcolm had never before been in this part of the castle, and he had never before been obliged to sit on the pavement.

"Now for the fortieth time, Jocky, tell me where he is. Carefully now! Think a minute before you answer! The reward is thirty thousand pounds. You never saw that much money, did you,

Jocky? Not even that night at Martin's when you had such diabolic luck. I'll break that just in half with you. Fifteen thousand pounds, and a passport for you and Lady Helen. I won't say who informed me. Neither will Harris. And I'll answer for the fellow back there."

"Go to the devil," Malcolm said wearily.

Fitzstephen frowned. If one prisoner did not tell where the Pretender was concealed, he would be obliged to wring it from the other. And even though Lady Helen Hornsby had married a rank Jacobite rebel, and had presumably been cut off by her father, she still could count many important personages among her friends back in London. Fitzstephen did not relish the prospect of becoming harsh with such a lady. Anything he might do to this rebel on the floor would be excused. But Hornsby's daughter was another person.

He tugged at his tunic, scowling.

"You're certain, Jocky? This is the last time I'll ask you to give it of your own free will."

"Thank the Lord for that!"

"I'm going to use the cat, Jocky—"

Malcolm made no answer. The threat was not a pleasant one to hear, but neither was it unexpected. Indeed, he wondered why it had not come sooner. They had already wasted two hours, and even now they seemed reluctant to wield the whip. Could it be that the butchers were growing weary of blood? Were their stomachs weakening?

Fitzstephen turned, nodded to the turnkey.

"Bring it in."

This fellow, grinning broader than ever, proudly made known the fact that he had been holding the lash behind his back all the while, aware that its use would soon be required. He produced it, rattling the little lead chunks that were fastened on the leather ends.

"Strip him," said the captain coldly.

They pulled off Malcolm's coat and waistcoat and shirt, tying his wrists together again afterward and throwing him face downward upon the floor. The stones were bitter cold against his cheek.

Fitzstephen took the lash, tickled the chief's bare back with it.

"Yell when you're ready to tell me. I'll have it stopped then."

He handed the cat to the turnkey, and that villain began his work. The first blow was no more than a caress, a measure of distance, a swish of cold little lead chunks over Malcolm's warm skin; the second blow stung; the third was like a splash of white hot steel spilled from a crucible. These came deliberately, well spaced and without hurry.

But then the turnkey seemed to warm to his task, and the lash rose and fell with a swiftness and fury that properly befitted the instrument. The leathern thongs whined and hissed in the air, and they smacked with a nasty sound upon the body where long red marks began to appear abruptly and unnaturally as though they were that many slits of red light thrown there through the cracks of a lantern. Blood came out of the marks, very bright and thick; the blood messed over the shoulders, across the neck and down into the small of the back . . .

Presently the captain said:

"Wait! I think he's fainted. Has he fainted, Lieutenant?"

But before Harris could make an examination, the voice of the laird, remarkably clear and hard, came from under the crossed arms.

"Is it a ten-year-old you think you're dealing with?"

"Hm-m-m . . . Very good, Jocky. A thousand pardons for my stinginess. But I don't want to kill you, unless you oblige me to. Give a cheer for his Majesty King George and we'll let you off for the present."

"Long live King *James!*" Malcolm cried promptly.

Fitzstephen frowned again. Obstinacy like this was annoying. If the Jocky did not submit soon it would be necessary to question Lady Helen. Too great a delay and the Pretender would have been warned.

"We'll go on then. When you're ready to tell, call out. If you can't call, make a motion with your hands."

And the turnkey resumed his work, feet spread wide apart, heels firm on the floor, face still split in a grin that he might have learned under the very tutelage of Lucifer. Again and yet again the lash descended. The thongs became covered with blood; and splashed blood specked out in a small half circle on the dark stones on either side. But the Glenallan did not move.

There were only these sounds in the room—the whine of the lash, the regular, juicy smacks, and the breathing of the turnkey, which grew heavier and less regular as the beating continued. Fitzstephen and Harris were perfectly still, the captain a black cloud of anger, the lieutenant pale and somewhat sick.

Eventually Fitzstephen called another halt. He walked to the prisoner and kicked him twice.

"Speak up, Jocky. Will you tell us?" There was no answer, and no movement.

"Is—is he dead?" Harris whispered.

"I doubt it," said Fitzstephen coldly, "but he might as well be, for our purpose. If he can stand that much he can stand anything. Let's go upstairs and see his wife."

And they quit the room, the turnkey following them. The turnkey locked the door.

MALCOLM had not fainted. There had been moments when he wished that he could; but now he was thankful that God had given him such strength. He had felt the captain's kicks only dully, as though they had been big blunt pushes against his side; for he was, at the moment, numbed almost beyond pain. But in spite of his condition, he had heard every one of the captain's words, and he was frantic with anxiety. Helen's honor and her fidelity he did not doubt.

But the poor girl had been unnerved by all this excitement and danger; her spirit had been pounded and pounded as though by an enormous, insistent hammer; she was near to panic, he knew, and if they threatened her enough and bullied her—as they probably would do—they might yet learn where Bonnie Prince Charlie was hidden. Helen knew. The rendezvous had been arranged long before Fitzstephen's coming.

He lay still. His back was one burn, as though it had been smeared with oil and then set afire. His head, too, was hot, and it seemed to be splitting open; his mouth was dry; and down to his very feet he knew the smart of the long red welts as the numbness wore off. The wound in his shoulder, which he had not felt for more than a week now, was throbbing heavily—a huge recurring pain.

But it was not this which kept him quiet. For the time, he was weak; but strength was coming back into him. For the time, it would be foolish to struggle with the ropes that bound his wrists in front of him. Very soon, probably, he would be needing all the strength he possessed: it was a valuable possession and not to be squandered in the darkness of a dungeon without purpose. So he did not move.

He worried most about Helen. He never ceased to wonder at this wife of his; and there were times when her love was so great that he was actually frightened by it, feeling himself such a wild young fool to be the cause of it. If he could get this business cleared up, if he could see the Prince safe in France, and be in France himself, and know that Donald was not in danger—then he could strive with more concentration of effort to be at least partially worthy of Helen Hornsby. God help him, it was not within the power of any man to

be more than partially worthy of that lovely thing.

He lay quiet. And an hour, perhaps two hours, passed before there was any sound in the corridor outside the door. Then came the footsteps of the turnkey, who was grinning still when he returned to view his victim at leisure. He peered through the bars of the doors. Malcolm did not move.

A key clicked. The fellow was going to inspect this prisoner's clothes. It might be that the coat pockets had not been searched, and it might be that there were silver pieces in those pockets. The turnkey was reluctant to see anything wasted on Scottish rebels. He would investigate for himself, since investigation was perfectly safe when the prisoner was in a swoon.

And certainly the prisoner was in a swoon—if he was alive at all. No man, the turnkey believed, could have remained conscious under that lashing.

He entered quietly, leaving the door open against the possible need for a hasty retreat. He'd get the lash himself if he were caught at this. He crossed the room on tiptoe and picked up the rebel's blue coat. It was not a promising garment; it was faded and dirty, ripped and cut and patched in many places, frayed at the bottom and at the pocket flaps. But there might be something in it. Meaner pieces of apparel had harbored coins. He began to fumble . . .

Meanwhile the laird of Glenallan was getting to his feet. It was a horribly painful process—difficult, too, with his wrists tied and his muscles all stiff. His knees and forearms scraped ever so slightly; but the turnkey, engrossed with the task of finding something of value in a ragged coat, did not hear these noises. Malcolm, with his two tied hands, picked a three legged stool from the floor.

This, too, scraped on the stones, and this the turnkey heard. He wheeled around, lifting an arm quickly enough to ward off Malcolm's blow. But the fellow was either too frightened to make a sound, or too anxious to get out of this business without being caught by his superiors. And Malcolm, with no such fear and no such anxiety, hit again, on the other side of the head; and this blow struck. The turnkey dropped. Malcolm hit him again as he fell, to be certain of the job.

Even then, Malcolm did not permit himself to hurry. He kept the stool in his hands, and he went to the door and listened for the space of at least three full minutes. There was a faint sound of footsteps and occasionally a blurred, distant voice, but there was nothing to indicate that this particular room or even this particular corridor would be invaded soon. Satisfied, Malcolm returned to the limp form of the turnkey.

There was a pistol in the belt, but no knife. He was obliged to free his hands by rubbing the ropes against the rough stone of the doorway until the ropes were frayed apart. He took the pistol then, examined the priming carefully and thrust it into his own belt. He donned his waistcoat, in order to cover his back, but he left the ragged coat where it had been when Fitzstephen and the lieutenant had quit the room; and he dragged the body of the jailer across the floor and arranged it in a position similar to that position in which he himself had been lying a short time previous.

Then he quit the room, closed and locked the door behind him and, pistol in hand, started to search for his wife.

CHAPTER XXVII

FITZSTEPHEN ERRS

FITZSTEPHEN was not optimistic. Being a snob, he respected Lady Helen for her birth and former position, and he knew he would have difficulty bullying her. And being, in this sense at least, a coward, he feared the influence she might yet summon to her assistance. If he were successful in getting from her the secret of the Pre-

tender's hiding place, and if he captured the Pretender—then all would be well, for then he would be too great a public hero to be hurt by Lady Helen's friends. But if he failed to get this secret, it might mean the end of his military career. Poverty and private life combined to make a future he could not contemplate with a smile. And so, partly to give himself courage and partly to have his own attitude formally supported by fellow officers, he conferred first with Lieutenant Button and Lieutenant Harris.

"We'll never get it from the Jocky. You saw that, Harris. The man's made of cast iron, I think. We must get it from this female if we're to get it at all."

Button suggested—

"Perhaps if we twisted her arm—"

"We'd be twisting our epaulettes off, Lieutenant. I tell you I knew this woman in London. I know her connections."

Lady Glenallan was in a large and well furnished apartment on the second floor of the castle, overlooking, by means of two broad windows, the open court and the high gates that framed the hills beyond. She was seated at one of these windows when the inquisitors entered. She nodded to Fitzstephen, ignoring the others.

Her appearance gave heart to the captain; for her eyes were red from weeping, her face was drawn with worry and she could not keep her fingers motionless in her lap, but was twining and untwining them constantly.

Nevertheless, there was a great dignity about her. She had bound up her hair so that it was firmly fixed at the back of her head, with only one truant lock falling over her right shoulder. In the dirty, torn gentleman's coat and waistcoat, and the dirty yellow breeches and stockings, she might well have blushed before these three soldiers: her fine long legs were there for them to view. But she was treating with the enemy, and she was cold. Her pride lent her a classic air.

Fitzstephen bowed, rather annoyed because he was not given a hand to kiss.

"Madam, there is a matter of the utmost importance we must discuss with you. May I beg you to pardon this intrusion and the presence of my fellow officers?"

Lady Helen nodded. She turned her head away from him and stared out of the window. She knew what he was about to demand of her. She had been thinking of nothing else since her capture.

Fitzstephen watched her closely He tried to be at once cold and polite; he tried to impress her with his determination and his military authority, at the same time reminding her, by his phrases and fine manners, of the folk she had left in London, and stimulating with this memory the realization that life was, after all, well worth living.

"Ma'am, I will be frank with you. You are in no mood for light conversation, and neither am I. But there is something I want to know."

"I will never tell you!"

So, the captain thought, she knows where the Pretender is, and she has been thinking about this very question and dreading it.

He continued, standing directly in front of her and keeping his gaze upon her face.

"This is a matter of life and death, ma'am. Not your life! We are soldiers of his Majesty King George; we do not touch women. But your husband is our prisoner. He has been a rebel against the crown, and we are going to hang him."

"You wouldn't dare! Not without a trial!"

"Ma'am, I would hardly dare do otherwise. I would be reprimanded for going to the trouble and expense of taking such a prisoner back to civilization alive. Your husband is a man dangerous to the peace of the realm. A trial would be folly. He admits his guilt—nay, ma'am, he even boasts it. You yourself admit it."

"I admit that he risked his life for the restoration of his rightful sovereign!"

"I can't enter into a political argument with you now. There is a more important matter to be settled first. Where is the young Pretender?"

"I will never tell you!"

But there was little conviction in the tone. Fitzstephen smiled, surer now. The woman had been worn out by the hardships and dangers of the wilderness, the furious hide-and-seek she had been playing. She was weak now, frightened, incapable of really strong resistance to his wishes. Ordinarily, he knew, she might hold him off indefinitely. But this was no ordinary occasion. There were no props against her now.

"Where is he hidden, ma'am? You must tell me!"

She did not answer. She stared out of the window and saw the purple-gray hills, the mist draped lift of Ben Nevis, and very far off the bright glitter of an icy loch. Her heart beat wildly; her mouth was dry; she could not keep her hands still. She knew that her voice trembled. She felt as she had felt several times on the trip from Inverness, when they had crossed high places, skirting the edges of cliffs where the rock swooped down with dizzy straightness. But on those occasions she had always known Malcolm's supporting hand and heard Malcolm's slow, low voice quieting her frightened senses. And now she was alone.

FITZSTEPHEN'S advantage was perfectly apparent. He could kill Malcolm and get nothing but praise for the deed. And he would kill Malcolm if he were stirred to sufficient anger. She wanted to delay him, to gain time. But she felt the panic coming . . . And Fitzstephen, obviously, was not prepared to tolerate evasion. Another woman might have pretended to faint; but Lady Helen was no mummer to simulate emotion, nor was the captain a man to be fooled by such a ruse.

"Ma'am, if you'll look a little lower—"

There were three redcoats climbing the high gateway, and one of them carried a rope over his shoulder. A fourth, evidently a corporal, stood underneath directing the work.

"They are to use that for the gallows. Impromptu, but it seemed to be the most convenient place." He tugged with both hands at the bottom of his tunic. He ignored a signal that Harris was making, and continued in a quieter voice, "I have promised to be frank with you. Whether here or on the plain, your husband must hang. Surely you realize that. I mean to spare you the agonizing days of suspense and the disgrace of a public execution. You don't know about the executions? I had forgotten that you've been hiding in the wilderness. Let me tell you, then, that the rebels are being hanged and quartered everywhere. There are trials, to be sure, if you wish to call them trials. Do you suppose, ma'am, that your husband would plead not guilty? Do you suppose that the plea would have any effect, even if he were to make it?

"Ma'am, the assizes were never so busy and never so loyal. Jeffries at his drunkest, ma'am, was a seraph compared with these judges." His voice became sing-songy. "'The judgment of the law is that you, Malcolm What-ever-his-barbarian-name-is, return to the prison from whence you came; from there you must be drawn to the place of execution; when you come there, you must be hanged by the neck; but not until you are dead; for you must be cut down alive; then your bowels must be taken out, and burnt before your face; then your head must be severed from your body; and your body must be divided into four quarters; and these must be at the King's disposal. And God Almighty have mercy on your soul.' You see! I know it by memory, I've heard it so often recently."

He paused, watching her closely. Her resistance was melting away, and the end was near. He felt it.

"Believe me, this is no child's play, ma'am. You think I can not hang your husband here and now? That shows me how little you know about the freedom they've given us since Cumberland smashed the clans. That rope you see being strung will take his life when I give the signal from this window. My word as a soldier for that, ma'am. Do you think I would boggle at the life of a single rebel? Lord! I thought you knew me better!"

Lady Helen loved the Stuart and admired him. But there was no room in her heart for another person when she thought of Malcolm and the grand strength and bravery that Malcolm had. A woman must always be deciding. A woman could not be diverse, like a man, and embrace several ideals at once. She was forced to speak for one and reject all the others.

"If I were to permit your husband to escape I'd be disgraced. But if I were to capture the Pretender, such a petty blunder would be overlooked and the gratitude of government would still the voices of my enemies. This applies also to my comrades here."

Button spoke up:

"I confirm what my captain has said, ma'am. Tell us where the Pretender is hidden and your husband will be permitted to escape. There will be a search, of course, but we can promise that the soldiers will search the wrong places."

Harris contributed:

"We can provide passports for the two of you. Before the search is well started you'll be on your way to France."

Malcolm himself would never tell them. He would hate her for telling. He would fly into a rage when he learned of it. Probably he would throw her off, disown her, refuse even to look at her again or to look at the child that was to be born. Certainly he would despise her for the rest of his life: this was the best she might hope for. The Laird of Glenallan was no man to be forgiving.

"It could be arranged very quietly. No one would know you had gone until a proper period of time had elapsed."

It seemed as though she had plenty of leisure. Hours, it seemed, stretched in front of her, limitless. She fell to thinking about Bonnie Prince Charlie as she had first seen him when he rode into Edinburgh, an exile, young and handsome, come back to claim his own again.

He had been doing what his father and his grandfather had failed to do—what, it was said by old and learned men, could never be done by any man in the world. She remembered how gay and how brave he had been, how he had waved his hand to the cheering crowds, how gracefully he sat in saddle. She remembered the bright blue bonnet he had worn, the bonnet all trimmed with silver lace and fronted with a white rose fresh and light as April air.

"I am losing patience, ma'am. The soldiers, I see, have fixed the rope. Unless you give me an answer within five minutes, I shall command that your husband be hanged immediately."

Melodramatically he drew a watch; and he faced her, tall, heavy, menacing. Fitzstephen was often an idle boaster, but she knew that he was telling the truth now. The man was mad for money.

She watched him, dully staring, wondering why she still had that conviction that there was plenty of time; for it seemed to her that there were hours and hours in which she might meditate.

"Two minutes have passed, ma'am."

She remembered Bonnie Prince Charlie as she had first seen him in his concealment. Ragged, dirty, filthy even, he had bowed before her, lifting her when she would have curtsied, and kissing her hand as that hand had never been kissed before. He was happy, he had told her, to meet again the wife of the bravest man he had ever known. There was a charm about him that was not earthly . . . There was something of the

angel about him, something of the god. Rags and filth, he was yet a prince of the blood royal, a true Stuart, and he had lit the dim hut with a glow of nobility, an expansive, warm, infinitely awesome light that would have quieted a madman and caused a judge to gibber.

"The five minutes have gone, ma'am. Your silence I take as a refusal. Come, Button. Come, Harris. Let's get the dirty business over with."

She remembered the straight, hard face of Malcolm—the thin nose, the big strong mouth, the black eyes filled with arrogance. She remembered the way he walked, the way he held his head. And she remembered, too, that old fashioned thing he called his honor.

She said quietly—

"I'll tell you."

The courtly manner dropped from Fitzstephen like an unwanted cloak. His play-acting was gone. He leaned forward eagerly, the better to catch every word she might say. Button and Harris were beside him, and their eyes sparkled like his.

Tears were flowing down Lady Helen's cheeks now—unrestrained—a large and silent torrent. Her heart was breaking.

"He's in a cave at the other end of Glenallan—on the little hill at your left as you go away from the sea—just underneath the two dead pine trees. He—he is alone," she added.

Captain Fitzstephen clapped his hand on his saber hilt. He grunted for joy, and dashed for the door, disregarding her now that he had learned what he wanted to learn. The men were in the yard, saddled and ready. It was a ride of not more than two hours. With Button and with Harris, but a step in front of both of them, he sprang at the door, swung the door open . . .

"Damn me!" And he stepped back.

For the barrel of a pistol was at his breast. And behind the pistol, feet spread wide apart, mouth tightened with an ominous tightness, was Malcolm MacIldowie, the laird of Glenallan. He advanced the pistol slightly, stepping forward.

"Go back, Captain. You and I have a quarrel."

THE Glenallan was in no hurry. He backed the three officers into the room, nodded rather curtly to his wife, closed the door, and then stood, pistol in hand, considering the situation.

He was not a pretty sight. Wigless, coatless, and very dirty, he stood against the wall not only for protection but also to keep from Helen the sight of his back—for he could feel the blood oozing through the waistcoat, and Helen, he feared, had already seen too much blood. A great deal might depend upon Helen. He looked at her steadily, impersonally, as though he were seeing her for the first time.

She had risen but she did not move toward him. She did not know whether he realized what she had told these men; she did not know how long he might have been standing outside in the hallway, nor whether, if he had heard, he would understand the panic that had forced her to speak. But his presence stiffened her, and she stood straight, prepared, now that he was with her, to withstand any storm of questions and remain faithful to her Prince under any pressure. Just the knowledge that Malcolm was alive and free filled her with strength. She was still pale, but her shoulders were thrown back and she had managed to steady her hands.

Malcolm studied the others, one by one, deliberately and well. From the hallway he had not been able to hear what it was Helen had told them, but he could guess: the faces of Harris and Button and Fitzstephen betrayed them. Malcolm glanced again at his wife.

"They know?"

She nodded.

Still Malcolm refused to be hurried. This was a delicate place. Ever so slight a move that was a wrong move, and Prince Charlie was dead—worse than

dead; captured and exposed to the jeers of the London mob. Ever so slight a move would do it. These men knew the hiding place. There were three of them; and outside were twenty more, saddled and ready. In the pistol was Malcolm's great advantage. Fitzstephen and the two lieutenants had only their military sabers. He could kill only one of them by shooting, but it would be the first one who resisted his commands, and each of them appreciated this fact.

One thing was certain. It was absolutely necessary that none of these officers leave the room alive. For if one got out the alarm would be given and the ride for the Prince would begin. The Dragoons were all well mounted and all reasonably good horsemen; even supposing that Malcolm could escape and get a horse, it would not be possible for him to reach the Prince before the soldiers. But there was one pistol ball at his disposal, and so he considered the situation with great care.

Fitzstephen and Button and Harris stood in the center of the big room, necessarily patient. They did not try to resist, nor did they try to argue or threaten or make promises. The Glenallan was no man to be dealt with in that fashion.

Presently Malcolm turned again to his wife.

"Are you well?"

"Yes—"

"Do you feel strong enough to hold a pistol and shoot straight when I tell you to shoot?"

"I could do it for you."

"Be sure!"

"I could do it for you."

He summoned her to where he was standing, and placed her with her back against the heavy door. He handed her the pistol. The three officers he commanded to stand on the opposite side of the room, between the windows.

"Listen to me carefully, Eilidh. You are to shoot through the chest the first one of these men who steps away from the place where I put him. But you are not to shoot until I tell you to shoot. Do you understand?"

She was afraid to talk now. She braced herself against the door, wetted her lips, nodded.

The Glenallan, keeping carefully to one side of the room, next addressed the three officers.

"Fitzstephen, with you I already have a quarrel. You others, I challenge you to fight to the death because you have invaded my wife's apartment without her permission."

He spoke very slowly, and never moved his head toward them. He was watching Helen.

"The two that are nearest to me draw your swords. The nearest man to me, hand me his sword. Keep the point away. I want the hilt."

This was done, with the utmost care on the part of each man concerned. The pistol, held firmly, still menaced the officers. Lady Helen was a statue.

Saber in hand, the Glenallan turned.

"Now I'll fight you one by one. You first—defend yourself."

The man he indicated was the one nearest to him, Lieutenant Harris. Now Harris was not a brave man. But a man he was; and he would rather go into a duel, even with such an opponent, than be shot dead like a lame horse. He advanced to the center of the room, facing the chief. Nervously he saluted and dropped his blade to guard position. They touched weapons—a tiny click—and then each stepped back. Harris had no desire to attack. Malcolm waited for a full minute, studying his opponent's face: it was a minute of terrible length for each of the others in the room, Harris included. Then Malcolm sprang.

It was typical of this man that his heart always held his enemies in contempt, and their ability to fight he belittled by habit. With a claymore, one blow would have finished Harris. But the saber, though easier to swing because of its lightness, was, and for the same reason, easier to parry. Malcolm's first blow was caught and nicely turned

off, and a riposte swiftly delivered caught him on the right shoulder.

The riposte was light. The lieutenant's sword had scarcely penetrated waistcoat and shirt. But it was unexpected; and if Harris had been a bolder man he might have followed this with another blow that would have ended the duel. As it was, Malcolm sprang back out of measure, his guard high.

He attacked again, this time more carefully, with a series of head blows, every one of which was parried. Harris was no mean swordsman. He answered feints only with the tiniest wrist movement, his parries were never wide, and the few cuts he himself made were surprisingly quick. But Harris remained on the defensive; and Malcolm pressed the attack again and again. The steel rang loudly, the men's feet scuffled back and forth across the smooth floor.

IT OCCURRED to Malcolm that the soldiers on the other side of the courtyard outside might hear these noises. He stepped back, dropping his guard, and listened. Harris stopped gratefully. The castle was quiet. From the court came only the occasional stamp of an impatient horse and the warm, distant buzz of conversation Probably the Dragoons, if they heard, supposed that their officers were amusing themselves with a mock duel.

Button and Fitzstephen watched the contest from their post between the windows. They did not speak, nor did they move. Neither had much respect for the markmanship of Lady Helen, but the distance was little and neither cared to chance a dash for the door.

Lady Helen watched. Her eyes were very big, and she was biting her upper lip where the blood showed bright through a skin that was elsewhere blank white.

As for Malcolm, he never doubted the outcome. He could feel his own superiority in every stroke he made, and after the first attack the lieutenant's swift parry and riposte entirely failed to disconcert him. But he was annoyed at the cleverness of Harris's defense; and he was impatient to finish the job and kill the other two men.

He stepped in again, this time purposely swinging wide. Harris did not even attempt to parry what he mistook for a clumsy shoulder cut. Instead, Harris lunged, meaning to kill with the point. But that was precisely what Malcolm had hoped for. Harris's blade was thrown off easily, and a strip of bright steel slid between two of Harris's ribs. The lieutenant collapsed without a sound.

Instantly Malcolm turned upon the other two soldiers.

"Stand still!" But they had not thought to stir. And Malcolm pointed to the body of the lieutenant and spoke to Button. "Drag that out of the way. Take the saber. You must be ready for your turn." Then he spoke to Fitzstephen, "You're next, Captain."

Now Fitzstephen had all of the skill that Harris had possessed, and in addition he had plenty of courage and plenty of spirit for combat. Moreover, he had been crossed too frequently by this insolent Scot, who now, it would appear, was about to take thirty thousand pounds from under his very nose. He was in a cold rage; his muscles had twitched as he watched Harris defend himself, marking the times when Harris might have made cuts if he had been more willing to step closer. Now he gripped the saber and dropped into guard with a manner quite different from that lately displayed by his unfortunate lieutenant. He did not salute.

They touched blades, and Malcolm attacked instantly. Fitzstephen retreated only two steps, slowly. Then he held ground. The sabers were moving in lively fashion. Neither man hesitated to step into the measure and neither was afraid of counter attack. A down blow, especially strong and not well parried, beat Fitzstephen's blade enough to open the skin above his right ear; and

in the same exchange, Fitzstephen's edge grazed the Glenallan's right temple, letting a little blood.

Either of these touches would have been sufficient to stop an ordinary affair of honor. But this was not an ordinary affair. There were no seconds, and there was no cartel, and it was understood by both men that there would be no quarter.

Nor was there an instant's letup. It did not seem possible that two men could engage so closely and remain alive. The blades were both busy: they swished the air bravely, glittering, ringing, sometimes sending out wee sparks . . . Lieutenant Button, open mouthed, watched the greatest swordplay it had ever been his fortune to witness. Lady Helen still did not stir; but now her hand trembled, the hand that held the pistol; she had caught a glimpse of Malcolm's back, and this, together with the blood on Malcolm's face, had so sickened her that she did not know when she might swoon. In a corner near one of the windows was the corpse that had been Harris; and it was grotesquely hunched over as though he had been shot while seated on the floor.

"This for Martin's, Jocky!"

Malcolm parried and made a savage return for the right flank.

"This for Looney!"

Malcolm took a low guard, holding his blade in prime position and cutting repeatedly for the body. Fitzstephen held his hand low and his point was directed at the Glenallan's eyes; his cuts were shorter but a trifle quicker than Malcolm's cuts. Fitzstephen kept his blade in line better than the Scotsman, being accustomed to fencing with the small sword, while Malcolm was more familiar with the heavy claymore. Malcolm moved quickly in and out; Fitzstephen wasted no steps, but he was quite as quick when he did move.

They were, in fact, perfectly matched. But the Lady of Glenallan did not seem to appreciate this. Already near to collapse, the fight had so terrorized her that she was not able to hold her knees stiff or to keep her hand and arm steady. It happened that the English captain was, at this moment, pressing the attack —advancing regularly, step by tiny step, forcing Malcolm to back away. The attack was delivered in a burst of extraordinary speed and force; but it did not trouble Malcolm, who retreated slowly, warily, watching for a false move.

Lady Helen did not realize this. To her it seemed that Malcolm was about to be killed. She could no longer control her battered nerves. She closed her eyes, stiffened her right arm full-length, tightened her grip on the pistol . . .

The explosion, for an instant, paralyzed the three men, who had forgotten all about the pistol.

Then Button straightened with a jerk. Fitzstephen and the Glenallan stared wildly at one another, through the moving smoke, instinctively stepping back out of the measure.

Lady Helen's arm fell to her side; the pistol clattered on the floor; and Lady Helen slipped to her knees, half fainting. The ball had done no more than knock some chips of stone from the wall between the windows.

Button jumped first. He reached the door, pushed Lady Helen aside. But in doing this he turned his back on Lady Helen's husband, who, only a step behind, promptly cut open the lieutenant's head with a terrible down blow. But Fitzstephen, encircling both men, got through the door and slammed it behind him. Malcolm reached the hallway only in time to see him disappear around a turn, yelling.

Malcolm went back into the room, closed the door behind him, put a table against it. A glance showed him that Button was dead. The man lay perfectly still, pitched forward on his face, within a few inches of Lady Helen; and blood was pouring from the top of his head. Lady Helen herself was on hands and knees, trying to get up. Malcolm lifted her in his arms, deposited her in

a chair, and went to one of the windows.

He saw the redcoats scamper toward the horses, while other redcoats came swarming from the two doors on the right of the court, an abruptly busy crowd. Then he saw Fitzstephen, hatless but still holding his sword, and yelling.

"Mount, you fools! Where's your sergeant? *Mount!* After me—every man of you!"

Malcolm saw the whole troop mount with a smoothness and precision which made him, even at that moment, envy them their horsemanship. He saw them wheel, fall into place, and gallop out under the gate, perfectly spaced, their captain at their head, their gay plumes tossing, their sabers arattle in the scabbards at their sides.

He turned back to Helen and shook her vigorously.

"Can you run?"

She blinked, swayed, a rag in his hands. But there was vast relief in her eyes.

"Malcolm, I couldn't help it. I thought he was going to kill you."

"Can you run?"

"If you're with me."

He jerked her to her feet, hurried her to the door, shoved her out into the hallway. There was one chance left. If Helen could keep with him, if he could remember the path without a single misstep, and if the men were still at the cave . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

OVER THE WATER

THEY had placed Helen behind a large rock, and Malcolm had instructed her not to stir.

"One of Patrick's men will take care of you if anything happens to me," he had told her. "You shouldn't be here at all, but I'll not be letting you get far away from me again."

Now he was superintending the distribution of the muskets, and peeping from behind her rock she watched him. They had run or walked very fast the whole distance, and he had carried her for more than a mile; she was still breathing hard, but he seemed unchanged.

"It's a grand lot of guns, Patrick. You took them from the Saxons?"

"Aye, MacDomhnull Dhu."

There were eight men and fifteen muskets. In addition, Patrick Grant had equipped Malcolm with a pistol and a claymore; and only two of the robbers lacked swords.

Malcolm, grimly silent, bit off the end of a waxed paper cartridge and poured gunpowder into the barrel of a Brown Bess which had once been shouldered by one of King George's men; he dropped the ball on top of the powder, crumbled the waxed paper and stuffed this in for wadding, and then jammed down with the ramrod. They were all loading muskets and stacking them against trees to await his orders.

"Eight of them here, each man wherever he can hide best. Then the rest down there where the rocks stick up. We'll go to those under our own smoke."

Patrick Grant was respectful, but dubious.

"Are you sure they must come this way, MacDomhnull Dhu?"

"Aye."

"But—"

Malcolm fairly snarled at him.

"Do I no' ken my own country, mongrel!"

Patrick Grant was silent after that.

The weapons placed, there was nothing to do but wait. The Seven Men of Glenmoriston, not unaccustomed to attacking several times their number in redcoats from ambush, were not nervous; they hid themselves quickly, seeming to melt into the landscape. Malcolm walked up to where Helen sat.

"Don't you fear they might have come and gone already?"

He shook his head.

"The ground's too soft for them to go fast." He was worried, but not about

that. His one fear was that Prince Charlie, who had carried a pistol, might have killed himself rather than submit to capture, or might have been killed when he threatened to fight. It was a terrible thought, that Charlie might be dead.

"Are—are you just going to stay here and shoot down?"

"No. They'd gallop off with him."

"But you can't charge a whole company of them!"

He had been staring up the glen, up past ruined Allan's Castle. Maybe he was thinking of bonnie Fergus and the grave he had dug for Fergus near the gates. Helen, looking up, thought she had never seen him look so dark, so black browed and dangerous.

"We can, lassie, and we will. But you must stay here. Their muskets won't carry quite this far, but I don't want you even to look out. It's not going to be pretty."

He leaned over, and with two fingers of his right hand he lifted her chin; and he kissed her. He was suddenly tender and soft spoken.

"My brave Eilidh. My brave, brave wife," he murmured.

But he straightened, glanced up the glen again, glanced down the slope where the Seven Men were concealed.

"Remember—don't move," he whispered; and he walked away.

She did move. Waiting motionless was too great a strain. After a long time—it seemed like an hour, but perhaps it was no more than a few minutes—she peered around the edge of the rock, staring up the glen. It was as she had first seen it; it was utterly desolate and terrible to contemplate. The dark, broken castle was a dead thing at the edge of a dead loch. Nothing stirred, and there was no sound. The clouds, black and harsh, scuttled past so low that they seemed to scrape the hilltops: they seemed to be trying to reach down into the glen and claim it for their own.

Lady Helen looked out a little farther, looked down the slope. There was no sign of any human being, though she knew that somewhere among the heather and rocks eight men were staring with steel hard eyes along eight musket barrels. Eight men were waiting there: just waiting, and content to wait. But she could not see a bonnet, not a glint of metal, or a corner of tartan. The silence was awful. She thought that if no word were spoken soon, if no sound were made, she would go mad. She sat back on the ground abruptly, ducking her head, biting her lips, to control the jumpy nerves.

When next she looked up the glen she saw something moving in that dead place. The rain came down again in a thin, soundless drizzle, and the clouds were very low and dark; but Helen could see, even through the murk and mist, that something was moving.

She watched, fascinated, and straining her eyes. She saw finally that this was the Dragoon company returning. At first she knew them rather by their motion on walking horses than by any detail her gaze could pick in the group. Then she began to see them more clearly.

But the utter silence continued. The cavalcade moved slowly, gingerly over the wet and treacherous ground, making no noise. It would be obliged to go past the very bottom of the slope, which seemed asleep. The glen narrowed here, and the horsemen would be caught in a spot where they would be crowded together, completely surprised, unable to see the enemy; and unable, too, to maneuver unless they first dismounted. The breeze was blowing down the slope toward the narrow pass: it would carry the smoke into the eyes of the redcoats and would cover the shifting of the ambushed force.

All this had been carefully calculated, but Helen did not realize it. All she knew was that her husband's men were outnumbered more than two to one.

She waited. She watched the unsuspecting men come closer and closer. She held her breath. But nothing happened

and there was no sound. They were so close now that she could hear the creaking of their saddlestraps.

Prince Charles was in their midst, mounted, his wrists tied behind him. Beside him, proudly smiling, was Captain Fitzstephen. Perhaps the captain was the happier because his two lieutenants were not alive now to share that reward with him; he would have it all to himself, except for some trifling sum thrown to the soldiers.

THE redcoats were passing along the very bottom of the slope now, breaking into double file and walking their horses carefully over the marshy, hummocky ground. Prince Charles, his chin on his breast, was jogged back and forth; he was like a corpse, limp and lifeless, crushed by the humiliation; only a horseman's instinct kept him in saddle.

Lady Helen almost rose in her place. Were they going to let these scoundrels pass? Had they become afraid, crouching in the bushes there? Why didn't they fire? Why didn't they fight?

Then there came an explosion that smashed the whole vast silence of the glen, shaking the very rocks, seeming to scare back the very clouds. The eight muskets had crashed as one. The echoes banged back and forth, up and down Glen Allan; and ripping through this hollow roaring were shrieks, war cries.

Then, on the slope, there was silence again. Helen knew that the attackers had moved lower down the slope under cover of their own gunsmoke, to where the rest of the muskets were laid out in readiness. And as the smoke rolled across the pass, she saw a wild group of soldiers, some of them on the ground, some of them tugging at the reins of mounts which were rearing and stamping. One fellow broke from the rest and went galloping back up the glen. Fitzstephen, she saw in the instant that she dared to look, was pushing Prince Charles back toward the glen; and Charles himself had raised his head and was staring with wild hope toward the hillside, blinking in the sharp smoke.

Some English soldiers raised their muskets, and Lady Helen dodged back behind the rock, not daring to look again. She heard another perfectly timed volley, more warcries, and shrieks and yells. She heard the stamping of horses, a wild cursing, the horrible snorts of panicky, wounded horses.

Presently Patrick Grant was standing beside her. He was out of breath and perspiring, but impassive as an Oriental.

"MacDomhnull Dhu says Prince Charlie is safe."

"Is it all over?"

"Aye, lady."

"But what is Sir Malcolm doing? Is he safe?"

"Aye, he's safe. He wants to fight the big *siler roy* but Charlie will no' allow it."

She stood up. At the bottom of the slope, where a few minutes previous the cavalcade had been filing past, was a frightened, cowed, unarmed group of soldiers. Some of the horses were stretched out on the ground, still kicking. Some of the soldiers, too, were lying down; perhaps they were dead. Anyway, the Glenmoriston men were going through their pockets systematically and without hurry.

Prince Charles she marked instantly. By his rags alone he might have been a member of Patrick Grant's robber band, but he had still that air of grand dignity. Malcolm was in front of him, holding a bare cavalry saber in each hand and obviously pleading. She saw Prince Charles shake his head. Nearby stood glowering Fitzstephen.

She ran down the slope, stumbling, calling. Fitzstephen raised his eyebrows when she appeared, and he even made a little bow. Some of the captive soldiers gasped stupidly, as though at a vision. But most of the rest paid her no attention. Prince Charles bowed.

"I am delighted to see you safe, Lady Glenallan. If you had been hurt in

helping us I should have been desolate." He kissed her hand.

"Your Highness," she gasped, "don't let them fight any more."

"I have forbidden it. Will a MacIldowie disobey me?"

Malcolm did not move. Helen had never seen his face so dark. Dark naturally, the sun and wind had made it darker, and now rage was pounding the blood there so that it was almost black. He glared at the ground in front of him.

"If your royal princeship will deign to change his royal mind—" it was Fitzstephen—"I might just as well be killed after I've sliced this upstart. We have a private quarrel. And these savages will tear me to pieces anyway, the minute your back is turned."

"I have forbidden it," Charles Edward said again. "There must be no private settling of quarrels while the war is on."

"The war, as you call it, is over," said Fitzstephen.

Charles Edward Stuart responded sharply.

"This war, sir, is never over. It will never be over until the right side has been victorious. We are not defeated, sir. We are only suspending our struggle."

Fitzstephen deliberately turned away from him. He faced Malcolm, who did not look up.

"If *you* can't disobey this false prince, Jocky, *I* can!" He reached forward and wrenched one of the sabers from Malcolm's hand. "On guard, sir!"

Helen screamed. Charles Edward stepped forward, crying something that nobody heard.

But it was ended very quickly. Malcolm sprang back, parrying once. Fitzstephen, snorting like an angry bull, jumped at him again. Fitzstephen was over-excited perhaps, too eager. Malcolm caught the stroke high on his own blade and cut back with a complete overhand motion. It was the kind of riposte only a very brave man under certain conditions, or an utter fool, would attempt. It caught Fitzstephen exactly on the top of his head, and the big captain of Dragoons pitched forward on his face without a sound. There was no need to examine him. The whole top of his skull was crushed.

Charles Edward turned Lady Helen away quickly, and held her by the shoulders, firmly, kindly, refusing to permit her to turn back. A moment later Malcolm was standing in front of them, swordless and humble, and much more self-possessed; the blood was no longer pounding in his temples.

"I am sorry I seemed to have disobeyed your Highness, but your Highness could see that I acted only in self-defense."

"I understand, Glenallan. There was nothing else for you to do. Let us take Lady Glenallan away from this place."

ON AN ordinary day you could not have found a spot in the world more deserted, and few spots more difficult of access, whether by land or by sea, than the hill locked fjord of Lochnanaugh. You might have supposed, standing at the base of the rocks and gazing across the sullen, cold water, that Time had reversed her spool and left you in the very midst of a primeval forest untainted by the foot of man, your face caressed by sweet air that had never known a curse or a sob, your shoulders touched by foliage which human shoulders had never before brushed.

Lochnanaugh had known briefly the *Doutelle*, that jaunty little sea adventurer in which Bonnie Prince Charlie had come to raise rebellion and strife in the land. The *Doutelle* had sailed back to France; Charlie had marched inland, raising the clans; and the still, silent bay had returned to its slumbers while men fought and schemed and suffered or triumphed elsewhere. It had slumbered gratefully, convinced that it would not ever be disturbed again.

But now another French vessel stood

out in the bay, and once more the serenity of Lochnanaugh was shocked by man made excitement. The ship itself was crowded; along the rails were outcasts who were taking their last look at the land of their birth. And along the shore were Highlanders in blue bonnets, taking their last look at the Prince and their friends and cousins.

"Are you glad to be going, Malcolm?"

He almost sighed. He was gazing at the coast as a prisoner, entering his prison, might gaze back at the sunlight and green grass beyond the closing gates.

"I have you," he replied.

They were on the poop deck, with the other gentlemen—quiet Donald of Lochiel, John Roy Stewart, the hothead, beefy young Clanranald, Charles Edward Stuart . . . They waved and waved. They waved to Cluny Macpherson and Young Macpherson of Breakachie, who were staying; and to the lesser gentlemen, and to the helots crowding down almost into the chilly water. They waved and stared.

Charles Edward kept his right arm stiff and high in salute to those on the shore. His bonnet was in his right hand. Always he had a sense of the dramatic; and he knew that this tale of how he had sailed away would be told and retold at firesides for uncountable generations.

"I will come back!" he cried, and his voice rang clear across the water. *"I will come back!"*

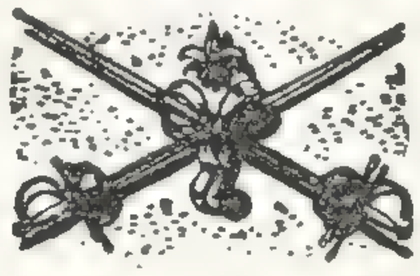
But the rest of the gentlemen said nothing. They only stared at Scotland.

Black rain clouds were hurrying up behind them, piling one on top of the next, pushing one into the other, massing for attack. Very soon, though it was midday, the scene would be dark and wet. But for the moment it was all bright sunshine, a calm, serene day. You could see the upthrust of gloomy and beautiful Ben Alder to which the landscape led with waves of heavy green pine trees. You could almost see lovely Ben Nevis. For the instant—before shadows leaped upon the hills to mingle with fellow shadows in the valleys, before the clouds took possession of the sky and the peaks, and rain and renewed mist filled the air—the western Highlands were basking in a strange and awesome peace. Then the storm came; and abruptly the Highlands were sullen again, brooding, dreaming their ancient, melancholy dream.

Charles Edward Stuart relaxed his pose: they were too far from shore now to make it necessary. He dropped his right hand on the nearest shoulder—the left shoulder of the last MacIldowie. And the two men stood there gazing through rain at the vague outlines of a mist blurred shore.

"It's a braw country, Glenallan," said Charles Edward Stuart.

"Aye," said Malcolm.



THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

FOLLOWING the old Camp-fire custom, Stanley Vestal, who begins his Sitting Bull series in this issue, rises to make his bow to the circle:

Norman, Oklahoma

I was born in Kansas in 1887, and at ten years of age was taken to live in Oklahoma Territory, where I grew up in the Cheyenne-Arapaho plains country. Cowboys and Indians were plentiful. The classes of the State school I attended were held in empty store buildings sandwiched between saloons and wide-open gambling houses. I was the first Rhodes scholar from the new State of Oklahoma, 1908-11, and after that I lived three years in Kentucky, but returned to the short grass and the Cheyennes, to spend my time writing and digging up old memories. During the war I was captain, and later acting C. O., First Battalion, 335th F. A., A. E. F. Since then I have taught in the State University of Oklahoma.

When not working, I can generally be found somewhere along the Rockies or on the Plains in Canada and the United States, visiting historic scenes or listening to some old-timer in a cabin or tipi. My favorite sports are riding, polo and hunting coyotes.

THE books I have written are: "Fandango", "Ballads of the Old West", "Kit Carson", "Happy Hunting Grounds", and " 'Dobe Walls". I have edited a number of books of early Western travels, including Seger, "Early Days Among the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians" and L. H. Garrard, "Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail". During the past year I have been working as a Guggenheim fellow, completing my book on Sitting Bull, now being serialized in *Adventure*.

A love of Western history runs in my family; my stepfather, W. S. Campbell, whose name I go by, was one of Bancroft's staff.

I spent three years on this job, interviewing all the old-timers who had anything to say in all the tribes both in Canada and the States which had any contact with Sitting Bull. I also covered the records of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, the archives of the Dominion and of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, various

State Historical Societies, the files of the War Department, State Department, Bureau of American Ethnology and Library of Congress in Washington, D. C. But as only one white man knew Sitting Bull before he was fifty, the Indians proved the best source of authentic information. Their stories poke a good many holes in the accepted legend. —STANLEY VESTAL

THE Varangian Guard again—a reader presents his evidence for the belief that its composition was predominantly Scandinavian rather than Slavic:

Shoshoni, Wyoming

In the October 15th issue I note a query from Poland and also the answer to it by Miss N. B. Sokoloff regarding the Varangian Guard of old Constantinople. In some respects I beg to take decided issue with Miss Sokoloff about the composition of this famous body of warriors. I agree with her regarding the penetration of the Slavic race as far as the Aaaland Islands and possibly as far as the east coast of Sweden before the beginning of the 10th century, and the possibility that some of these Slavic tribes might have been the early Varagi mentioned in early legendary Russian history. There was a very early intercourse between the South Scandinavians (distinct from Swedes) and some of the Slavic tribes of Russia.

In fact, if we are to trust some early Scandinavian saga records we even find in the middle of the 8th century, owing to the death of the male line of the Danish kings of Leire, that a direct descendant of a Slavic royal family was the founder of a new race of Danish kings, founding his claim by the female right. This was Sigurd Ring, who was the grandson of a Danish princess and also the grandson of a Slavic king. From 780 until 1030 was the height of the Viking tide. The same race which swept all over western Europe, invaded the British Isles, and founded kingdoms and earldoms in Ireland, Normandy, England and the Orkneys and subsequently the kingdom of the Two Sicilys, without the least doubt also carried their arms and impressed their character on the people of Southwest Russia of the present time and into the present boundaries of the present Poland.

They undoubtedly must have been the leaders and aristocracy of the men who founded kingdoms of Novgorod, Holmgard and Kieff. That they became absorbed by the native Slavs is simply stating a common historical fact. Any one who has the least knowledge of European history must be aware that there is a strong infusion of Scandinavian blood throughout the Greater Britain, Celtic East Ireland, the Hebrides and Normandy and even in the southern part of Itlay and in Sicily. These countries are much further away from the center of the Scandinavian activity in those days. This was the Wick country, comprising the Danish Isles, Jutland, Scania, the Western coast of Sweden and the Southern part of Norway, and add to these, the Gotlanders and Swedes proper, there must have been a very large number of Viking warriors who made expeditions into the countries in the watersheds of the Vistula, Dnieper, Duna and the Dniester.

THE Vikings of the 9th and 10th centuries were merely following the old trails of the older swarms which emigrated from Scandinavia and the South Baltic shores under the names of Goths, Gepidae, Vandals and Herulians. Even after the overthrow of the Eastern Gothic kingdoms, we know that the Byzantine Emperors generally had a bodyguard of Scandinavian or other Teutonic tribes, and this was really the beginning of the Varangian Guard. That other Northern elements were also included must have been true, and that the other element must have been Slavic is common sense to suppose. That these Viking commanders absorbed every fighting element among the natives would be self-evident. The common warrior would naturally take a wife or woman from the natives. We have a shining example of this in the history of the Viking raids in Ireland, where the Gael, or really the crossbred Norse-Irish, were veritable thorns in the sides of the native Irish.

The names of the early Russian or Variagi rulers in Kiev and in Novgorod show a strong infusion of South Scandinavian names; names such as Rurik—Rerek; Helgi or Halga (of the Beowulf poem); Oleg (another form would be Holger and even Ogier of medieval romance), Askold and Dir, names clearly slight variations of the Scandinavian Hoskuld and Dyr. These names would indicate a certain connection with the old Skioldung royal family of Denmark. This eastern trade route, known in the sagas as the East Ways, was a very old route going back to prehistoric times, and that it started on the Black Sea toward some point near the Gulf of Riga and then across to the Island of Gotland is well known from Roman and Greek sources. The treaty of Oleg with the Byzantine emperor was made about 911. In 945 Igor (Ivar) made a treaty with another Byzantine emperor, and among the 53 signers of the treaty we find fifty names of Scandinavian sources. This is a strong indication that at that time the Scandinavian element was the strongest among the aristocracy and nobles, instead of the Slavic.

If Miss Sokoloff is correct that Queen Olga of Kiev took back in 955 the remainder of the Varangian Guard that were left in Constantinople in 911 they certainly must have been a bunch of very old stiffs!

OTHER data mentions that in 902 there were 700 Varangians in the Guard. In 925, four hundred and fifteen is the number mentioned in

one expedition and in 949 the number of five hundred and eighty-four is mentioned in another raid made by the emperor's army. Between 930 to 970 there was a lull in the western expeditions made by the Vikings, and from all indications the more attention was paid to the eastern waters and eastern Viking expeditions were more frequent and more systematically followed both from Norway and Denmark. The Jomsburg Vikings turned their attention more to the Eastern waters. The Russian princes were consolidating their dominions, and while they had a similar guard at their courts, many of the adventurous Vikings went on further and joined the Constantinople bunch. During this period we find Olaf Tryggvesson, the most celebrated sea king, being raised at the court of Vladimir, and mention becomes more numerous of the intercourse and even marriages between the Scandinavian royal families and those of Novgorod, Kiev and Holmgard. The next two centuries the real Varangian Guard, better known to history and romance, comes out in the clear light of history. We have now records of Icelanders, Englishmen, Norwegians and Swedes in the Guard, and even Orkneymen.

THE Icelandic sagas are full of mention of individual champions in their ranks, and even feuds that arose in Iceland are revenged and finished in Constantinople. Arms and armor dug up of this period indicate that they are made on the lines made familiar to us by the Bayeaux Tapestry. Swend and Canute had consolidated their dominions in the British Isles, and in Ireland Brian Boru was cleaning out most of his opponents; the Norwegian and Swedish kings had also quieted down their respective dominions and the adventurers had to look somewhere else for employment. The Normans were making great headway with their South Italian conquests and the Byzantine emperors were busy getting all the good fighting men that they could gather in order to head off the Normans under the chiefs of the Hauteville family.

Just before this the greatest captain of the Varangians steps to the front in the person of Harold Sigurdson, who was their leader between 1035 and 1040. He leads many of their expeditions, and goes back to Sweden by the East Ways, marrying the daughter of the Kiev ruler and finally, after a checkered career, falls at Stamford Bridge in 1066. After the battle of Hastings, in the same year, we find the Guard reinforced by a large number of Englishmen and Danes and Norwegians. Their hostility to the Normans is fought out in the Balkans and at Dyrrachium in 1081 the Guard in the old time formation of the swinehead fylking smash through, with their double headed axes, the Norman infantry, only to be broken in pieces by a charge of the heavily armed Norman chivalry of Robert Guiscard. The tactics of Hastings were repeated on that day with similar results and again Saxons went down, fighting to the last against Norman horse.

DURING this period we find the Guard mainly composed of Englishmen and Scandinavians, but not many Slavs. Indications are that the bulk of the Northern men come through the East Ways, through Norway and Denmark. In fact, as the Southern Normans had control of the Mediterranean at that time, it would not have been so easy for the hostile Saxon to come that way. Here again we find some more connections between royal families, for the daughter of Harold, the last of the Saxon kings, is married to prince of Kiev, and naturally that would be the most hospitable road for an Englishman to follow in those days. From 1100 to the time of the Latin Conquest of Constantinople, we find many mentions of the Varangian Guard in Norwegian, Icelandic and English records. About 1090 Thorir Helsing, a Norwegian, was captain of the Guard. In 1120 we find King Sigurd of Norway paying the emperor a visit, after a little crusading in the Holy Land, and mention is made that many of his men stayed behind and joined the Varangians. He gets there by the Straits of Gibraltar. In 1153 after a joint expedition by Saint Rognvald, Earl of the Orkneys, and some Norwegian nobles, they are entertained at the same place by the Varangians.

They also come through the Gibraltar route. One of the last mentions in Norwegian history of the Varangians is that of Hreidar, who leads a band of rebels against King Swerrer about 1200. He is mentioned as having served for a long time among the Varangians and having attained high rank in the Guard.

All this data seems to indicate that Scandinavians, more so than the Slavs, were the main body of the Varangian Guard. In the Heimskringla we even find one mention made that they had the nickname of the "Emperor's Wineskins", indicating that they could hit the booze.

Regarding the word *kniaz* as denoting king or prince among the Slavs, some authorities claim with good reason that this is merely a corruption of the old Norse word *konung* or king.

—EDWARD L. CRABB

QUOTING a bit from a letter by Raymond S. Spears, Conservation Director of the American Trappers' Association, and member of our own Writers' Brigade. The subject is our current discussion about mountain lions:

Inglewood, California

The McMahan-Wells correspondence on mountain lions is just another proof of the regional, individual and species characteristics of wild life. Unquestionably cougars—panthers—have screamed. The scalpel reveals the proper vocal cords for this cat to scream. But some are reti-

cent, morose, furtive shadows of silence and others are wandering yells in the lonely fastnesses. In all matters of wild life, there is no such thing as *never* is. Innumerable things beyond the normal and commonplace have happened. I don't believe in ghosts, absolutely; but I have seen two.

Going through fiction as the fan readers do, I pause countless times, reflecting on first hand narratives of adventure that confirm what may have been a writer's fantastic bit of imagination. I have myself described a scene in fiction, and long afterwards come to it in a green timber forest, the reality of my aspiring fancy. When Mr. Wells refers to Lay, I stopped there in Colorado in 1927 and saw the photographs of cougars —and among them one from *Scribner's* Magazine (in the '90s) showing a cougar leaping from a tree top spread like a flying squirrel.

I'D COME down from Rock Springs, Wyoming, to Sunbeam, Colorado. At Lay a sheepherder just out of sanitarium looked for a ride. They asked me to take him to Craig. We ate supper there, and I dropped him at Hayden, or on beyond somewhere, after a hundred miles or so. The sheepherder had been seized by acute rheumatism. He was lying on the ground, unable to move. A dog saw he was helpless and went several miles, brought a trapper—herded him to the scene—and so the hapless shepherd was saved. And that dog was a young pup—six months!

Mr. Wells and I were writing for *Forest & Stream* in the Nineties. Charles B. Reynolds was the managing editor—I went to Tennessee on foot and down the Mississippi in a skiff for Reynolds and Grinnell.

MR. McMAHAN speaks with the assurance of first-hand observation. "No lion that ever lived can catch a deer though lying down." They ran deer down in the deep snow in the Adirondacks. In the pampas lions lie on their backs, stick their paws above the brush and wriggle them. The *ounacas* come with curiosity, like an antelope's, and are caught on the jump.

Though I have collated thousands of wild life data, from scientific, professional and sportsman's angles, I live to learn. However much Mr. McMahan knows, he mustn't forget there's a lot of information to be had from printed authorities, the use of which he has never known, obviously. I like him, though, as one of those old-timers, scorning the documents for his own absolute certainties. I was that way myself once, despising Book Learning of old.

—RAYMOND S. SPEARS

ON THE occasion of his first story in our pages, Everett H. Clark makes his introduction to the members of Camp-fire:

New York, N. Y.

The seed that grew into the story which introduces me to *Adventure* readers was a remark passed by a brother lieutenant of Marines when we were in the thick of the Nicaraguan bandit difficulties of 1928. The title phrase was his advance description of a coordinated drive centering on the deserted town of San Juan de Telepaneca, in which maneuver I commanded one of the columns, rotted the heels off my only pair of shoes, lost three pack horses that succumbed to sheer exhaustion on the muddy trails, and got not so much as a smell of the bandits we were supposed to destroy. None of the other four columns got any customers, either, though there were plenty of outlaws in the area at the time.

My personal background consists mostly of military service, though a few ventures in civilian occupations are sandwiched between. Born in Old Orchard, Maine, brought up in Burlington, Vermont, the war interrupted my education and its spare time sidelines of writing for local newspapers, ushering in a theatre and swinging a pitchfork on nearby farms. Not knowing the difference between the cavalry and the coast guard, I enlisted in what I afterwards found out was the Signal Corps, and went to France to copy German intercept for the radio intelligence. Since I was definitely qualified as a radio operator, it was only natural that most of my time should be spent running emergency telephone lines, delivering supplies to various TPS stations, and settling claims for the Rent, Requisitions, and Claims Service.

DISCHARGED in 1919, I climbed poles on a high tension line construction job in New England and worked for the Aluminum Company of America until the travel itch and a good recruiting sergeant convinced me that the Marines offered a promising career. Starting as a buck private who thought general orders were something the grocery man delivered, I was commissioned in 1922, married in 1924 in Santo Domingo —to a girl from New York—and decided to leave the Marine Corps in 1929.

Since becoming a civilian again I have written articles for the *American Weekly* and the New York *Times*, radio for the National Broadcasting Company, fiction for the *Saturday Evening Post* and, between times, have proved conclusively that it is impossible for a man to starve to death.

—EVERETT H. CLARK

Have you a friend you'd like to introduce to the Camp-fire? Use the coupon on the third cover and a free copy of Adventure *will be sent him.*

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Reptile

THE chance of stepping on a rattler in British Columbia is inconceivably remote.

Request:—"What kind of poisonous reptiles are to be encountered in British Columbia?

"I am thinking of making a prospecting tour in that section of the country."

—L. R. STEELE, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Karl P. Schmidt:—The only poisonous reptile in British Columbia is the Pacific rattlesnake. No precautions against it are necessary, except the ordinary one of wearing moderately high top shoes. This is not a large snake, and it rarely strikes above the calf. The chance of stepping on one is inconceivably remote.

Mexican Army

SLIM prospects for an American soldier.

Request:—"I am in the U. S. Army and have been thinking of coming to Mexico when I am discharged and enlisting in the Mexican army. I have about 8 years' military training and can speak enough Spanish to get along. Do you think that this is possible? I am an expert in all guns, from a .30 calibre to 5-inch field piece."

—LEONARD SEXTON, Panama Canal Zone

Reply, by Mr. John Newman Page:—I must advise you that foreigners are no longer permitted to enlist in the Mexican army. It is true that, during the time of the three-cornered struggle for supremacy between Villa, Zapata and Carranza, there were many Americans serving with one faction or another—and gunnery experts were particularly welcome. But "them times" are gone, perhaps forever.

Anyhow, I'm quite sure that Mexican army life would not appeal to you. As a private soldier you would receive a bit less than sixty cents a day, American money, and from that sum would have to feed yourself. And that means that you'd have to buy your own food and then cook it yourself—or hire it cooked. The majority of the Mexican soldiers solve that problem by picking up a *soldadera,* a "female soldier." That of course, necessitates feeding two mouths on sixty cents a day instead of only one; a Mexican can do it, but an American . . .

For food, treatment and pay, you are in the best military organization in the world right now, buddy. Better stick to it.

Forester

THE aerial fire patrol.

Request:—"What are the requirements for one who wishes to enter the Forestry Service aerial patrol? And what are the requirements for an ordinary forester?"

—H. R. BAKER, JR., New York City

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—I regret to be discouraging, but the forest fire patrol by air is not open to the general public for employment therein. It is carried on through a cooperative agreement between the Army and the Agricultural Department. The former furnishes the planes and pilots, and the Forest Service supplies the fuel and observers. These latter are men chosen from the National Forest personnel who are intimately acquainted with the country over which the men patrol.

The requirements for a forester depend entirely on the position filled. I suggest that you write The Forester, Forest Service, Washington, D. C., for a copy of the Use Book issued for public distribution. In it you will find in detail the duties, requirements, and qualifications desired in the men

to fill the various positions. Also much interesting information on the Service.

Rubber Camp

A MILLION miles from nowhere, and not much chance of getting away in a hurry.

Request:—"I am interested in learning something of the rubber country of Brazil. There is a possibility that I may go there for one of the large companies. I have already been in Rio and Santos, so that I have some knowledge of the country. What is the character of the natives who work the plantations? Do you know anything of the living conditions as regards this particular sort of thing? In what part of Brazil are the plantations situated? Is there any access to the outside world in anything like reasonable time?"

—WALTER JACOBSON, Brooklyn, New York

Reply, by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—The rubber country is in the great Amazon valley and is in the most tropical region of Brazil. It is the hottest part, whose temperature is only compensated for by rains and relative coolness at night in some districts. It is much hotter than Rio or Santos, which you know. It is not unhealthy if you can stand the heat.

The workers are the Sertanejos, or Indians, and other *mestizos* of Northern Brazil. Very definitely of the lower classes. Their wages in dollars are very low.

On some of the American plantations living conditions for the white-collar worker are the best human ingenuity can devise. That is, the homes, food, medical service, etc., are the best available. But the plantations are millions of miles from nowhere (on the tributaries of the Amazon).

No, I don't think you could get away to real civilization easily.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

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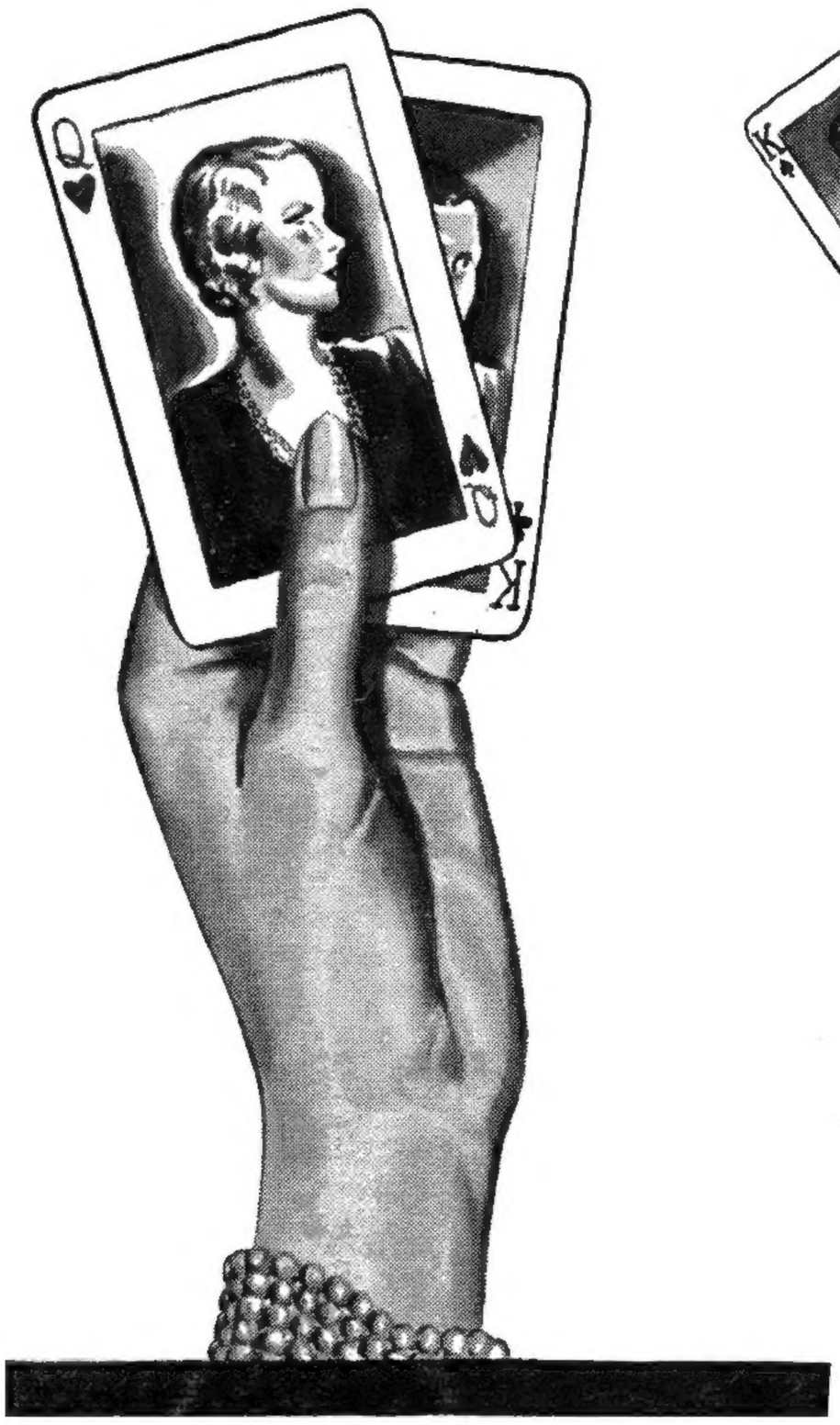

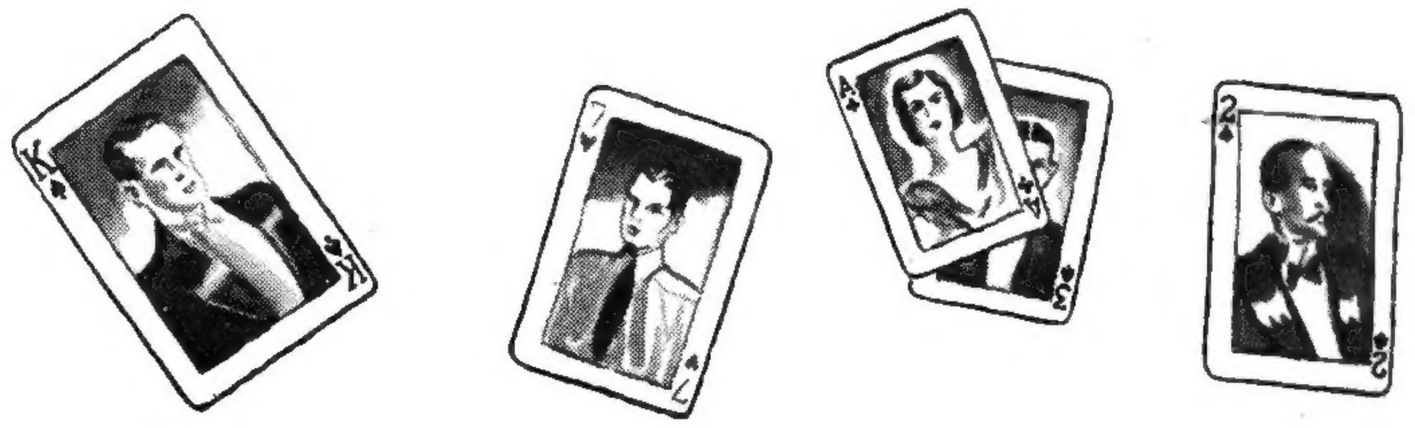

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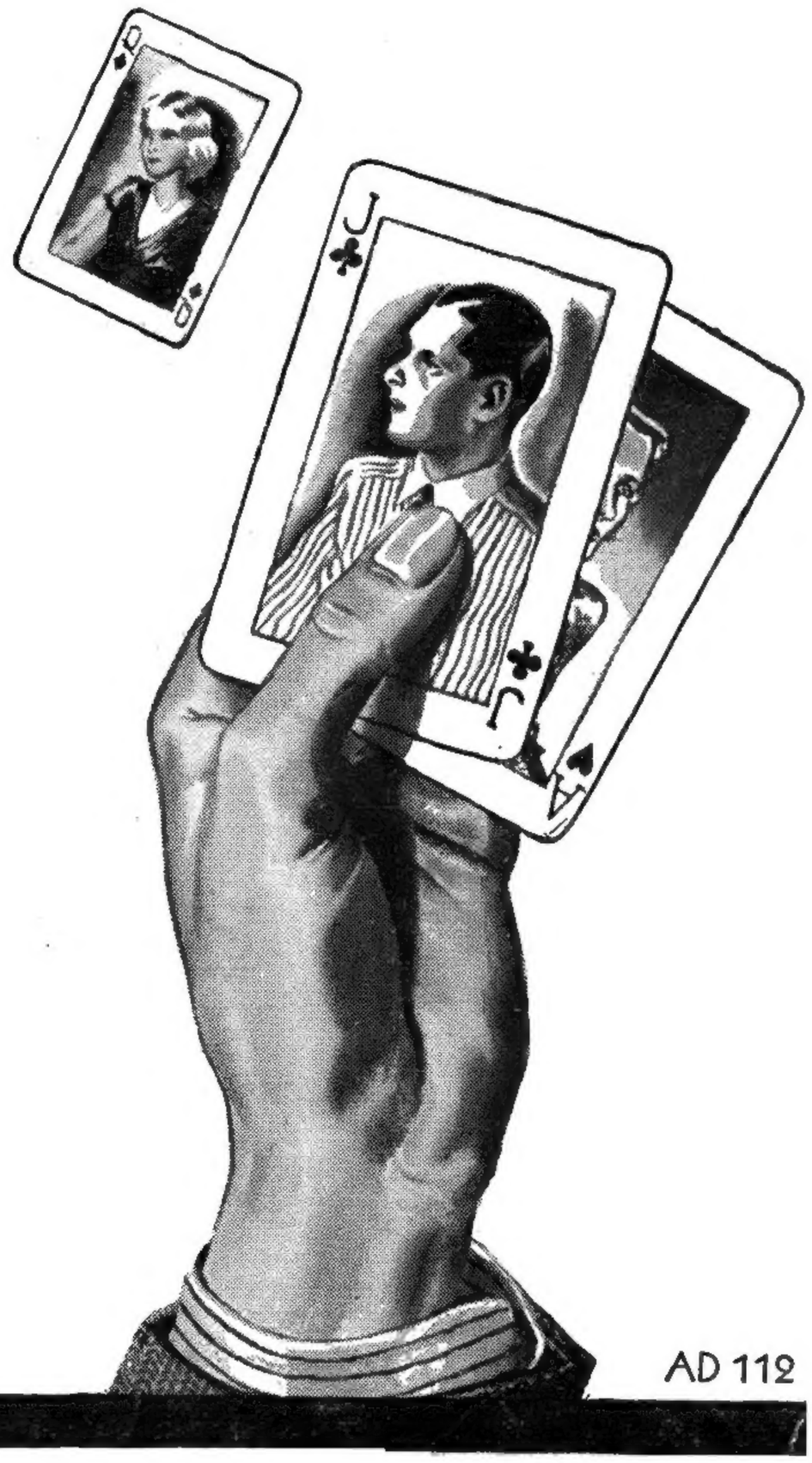

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